TALES

OF

THE CARAVANSERAI.

BY

JAMES BAILLIE FRASER,

AUTHOR OF THE "KUZZILBASH," "HIGHLAND SMUGGLER," ETC

THE KHAN'S TALE.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.



TALES

OF

THE CARAVANSERAI.

INTRODUCTION.

Towards the close of a bleak and lowering December day, when the scanty light which belongs to the season was still further impaired by a gathering storm, five mounted travellers were hastening along a barren and extensive plain, urging on their jaded animals against a bitter wind, which swept in furious gusts along its surface, and buffeted them sorely. The appearance of these travellers indicated a long and toilsome march; and the uneasy glances which they cast upwards at the thickening clouds, or forwards, to penetrate the darkness that was fast brooding over their path, betrayed their anxiety to reach some place of shelter, before the storm and night should overtake them in earnest.

The first of the travellers was a man past the middle age, of powerful and athletic form, whose harsh and dignified, yet not ill-tempered countenance, was characterized by the stern bearing of a soldier. A black bushy beard almost concealed his mouth; his large prominent nose and shaggy brows indicated a firmness and decision, which were confirmed by the keen intelligence of the eye that sparkled beneath them. On his head he wore the kuzzilbash cap, so lately, under the redoubtable Nader, the terror of the enemies of Iraun; but, like that conquered family in their fallen condition, now soiled and smirched by the blast of evil fortune. His person was enveloped in a huge *barrounée*, or cloak of scarlet cloth, lined with well-worn fur, and ornamented with gold embroidery, all stained and threadbare. A short, but heavy matchlock was slung at his back, the lock of which was carefully secured against the weather by a silk handkerchief. A crooked scymetar, suspended by a belt round his waist, was further made fast to his girdle; but the handle of another straight-bladed sword might be seen appearing from under the left flap of his saddle, where it was carefully bestowed, so as to be ready at a moment's need. His holsters were furnished with long-barrelled Turkish pistols, awkward in shape, but true and serviceable; and he was mounted upon a large powerful horse, of that admirable race which is bred in the deserts to the east of the Caspian Sea.

The second of the group rode nearly abreast of the leader, but [illegible] step behind, admitting, as it m[illegible]m, [illegible] superiority, but maintain-

ing that approach to familiarity, which belongs to companionship in arms; for he, too, was obviously a soldier, although his appearance and bearing at once proclaimed inferior rank. He was younger, slighter, and formed for more activity than the other. The good-humoured expression of his ruddy weather-beaten features, tempered, in some degree, the tone of rakish insolence and unblushing effrontery, which betrayed his connexion with the court, and stamps, with an infallible mark, the "*Gholaum-e-Shahee*." A *bashlogue*, or large felt hood covered his head-dress and shoulders, as did a stout camblet *joobbà* his smart *oemah*, or riding-dress; and he, too, was armed to the teeth with scymetar and carbine, and pistol and dagger in his girdle.

The third wore the sober garb of those who belong to the learned professions. The huge dark-green turban, and brown and grey-striped *abba*, or Arab cloak, thrown over a gown of thick brown woollen stuff, fastened crosswise over the breast, and girt with a huge grey Kerman shawl; together with the long straight, well-combed beard, the full opake grey eye, the sallow visage, and aspect of empty solemnity, left no doubt that the owner was some reverend Moollah — some priest or doctor, learned in the law and doctrines of Islam. But the gravity of his dress and deportment had been sorely disturbed by the bitter blast; and the restless wanderings of his bewildered eye savoured of anything rather than the assured and philosophic composure of a saint or sage, already th[illegible] for the joys of Paradise. He was mounted [illegible]ge and [illegible]erful ass, one of the celebrat[illegible] of [illegible]n

Arabia; which, though surpassed in swiftness by the noble steeds of that land, yield little to them in powers of endurance and easiness of pace. The Moollah, for the most part absorbed in his own cogitations or his fears, rode a pace or two behind the others; but yet so near, that a single stroke of his sharp stirrup could bring him up, to join in the conversation if required.

The fourth of the party, a grim veteran, with a frightful scar across his face, not less well armed than the others, clothed in a soiled green *oemah* and a fierce Tartar cap, was mounted on a boney beast of great strength and size. His dress and appointments indicated him to be one of that class of servants, in Persia termed *jeloodars;* and he rode in rear of the rest, but occasionally pushed up his horse alongside the leader of the group, with whom he would exchange a few words, or even join in conversation for a few sentences, in the manner of a confidential servant. Last of all, perched upon a heap of baggage, which constituted part of the loading of a stout mule, sat a man wrapped in an old *poosteen,* or sheep-skin pelisse, who jogged on with the apathetic indifference of a menial attendant.

The plain they were traversing was one of those extensive tracts so characteristic of Persia, particularly of its eastern provinces, which seem stricken with irremediable barrenness — grey, arid, surrounded with sterile, splintered rocks, and bordering on, or opening into the vast expanse of desert, which comprehe[illegible] large a portion of Khorasan. On the north [illegible] ste[illegible]rrier of frowning hills — a [illegible] su[illegible]fty and distant Elburz. A

lower range confined it to a certain extent on the south-west, leaving an interval gradually widening from five to twenty miles; while still further to the east it was lost in gloom, as it sunk into the trackless desert.

On the morning of the day in question, four of the travellers we have described had made their way through the intricacies of a long pass, which led for more than three furlongs among hills of earth and salt, in a ravine watered by a rill of bitter water. Contrary to expectation, they had escaped all attack from the thieves who were known to infest the "Gûrdernee Shurah," and had entered the long plain of Betullahee before the sun had declined above an hour from the meridian. The mountains on their left, (for they were holding an easterly course,) although brown and rugged, broke as they proceeded into a thousand varying shapes, and were pierced by numerous ravines and hollows, in which occasionally might be seen the ruins of a village, among the straggling trees that yet remained of its orchards. But all was silent and deserted; for the troubles that agitated Persia had borne hard upon this exposed tract; and travellers passing through it dreaded to see the form of man, where man could only be an enemy. The plain we are describing lay, in fact, on the way from Cashan to Nishapour and Mushed, or by Toorshez to Herat; and besides its share of the general disorders of the land, was peculiarly exposed to the Toorkoman hordes of the *Attock,** who, now [illegible] the only power

* Literally the *skirt* — that is [illegible] ... [illegible] to the desert, east of the Caspi[illegible]

which could overawe them had ceased to exist, broke forth with greater fury from long constraint, and swept constantly over it, in their way to richer and more populous districts.

In the golden days of the Seffies, when their arms and their name kept at bay the enemies of Iraun, and her husbandmen dreaded not, at least, the horrors of foreign outrage, even those barren plains could boast of partial culture, and the streams which here and there trickled from the surrounding hills, irrigated the corn, and watered the gardens of many a village nestled in the deep clefts and valleys. One after another, however, these had been attacked, desolated, destroyed; of their inhabitants, some had been murdered on their own hearths; others, carried off captives by the Toorkomans, were enduring hopeless slavery in the deserts of the *Karakoum;* whilst a few, dreading the same fate, had abandoned their homes, and in order to avoid the disasters which had befallen their neighbours, had gone in search of other abodes, in less exposed if not happier provinces.

As the travellers advanced, they observed an armed and mounted man, who, issuing from a hollow behind a projecting rock, advanced cautiously forward, making signals of pacific intentions. The chief in the scarlet barounee, unslinging his matchlock, rode forward a few paces, in order to reconnoitre the stranger, who, on his part, appeared only anxious to convince the party of his good faith, and approached without taking any such precaution. "*Ameen* [illegible]—is it peace?" demanded the chief with a lo[illegible] as they neared each other. "[illegible]*h A*[illegible]—please God, it is peace!" re[illegible] Bismillah, bismillah!" ut-

tered each; and enunciating the customary expressions of salutation, they rode back together to the rest of the groupe.

"And who mayest thou call thyself, friend?" interrogated he of the barounee, "who art found thus alone in such an unsainted place, and in such hazardous times, too! How are we to know, for all thy fair speech, that thou art not one of the rogues who frequent it with evil intent, and would make free with the goods and the throats of us travellers?"

"Ahi! what words are these, sir?" replied the other; "why should thy servant be such a person? may God forbid! he is but a poor traveller, and alone, as you may see; sorely in want of guidance too, and will thank God and your lordship for protection and company."

"Good, good—be it truth or falsehood, the servant of God before thee has little cause to fear, *inchallah!*—Thy comrades, if thou hadst them, would find him a hard nut with little kernel; so take heed, and be off if thou art a rogue; if truly an honest traveller, *bismillah!*—come with us and welcome! Thou hast arms, and shouldst know how to use them, if appearances may be trusted; and they may come to be needed before we cross the Sahrah."

"Ah, if it comes to that," replied the stranger, "it shall be seen if thy servant be *Saheb-shumseer* or no; it will not be the first time that Gholaum Hoossein will have smelt powder, or seen steel flash."

The chief smiled grimly. "... ou hast served, then?—and whom didst th... fri...

"Ahi! what a question!—whom should I have followed but the star of the destiny of Iraun, while it yet shed its light—the mighty Nader!"

"*Thou* a follower of Nader?—and what place didst thou hold among the fishes of that mighty sea?" demanded the chief with somewhat of a contemptuous tone.

"I was attached to the corps of the brave and generous Ruhmut Khan Affshar," replied the gholaum, stedfastly regarding his questioner.

"By the head of Nader himself, thou liest," exclaimed the chief, in an elevated tone of voice, but not, as it seemed, altogether in displeasure. I know thee not, thou rogue with a burnt father! thou never wast beast of mine!"

"Ahi! then thy slave was not mistaken! and it is truly Ruhmut Khan himself, exclaimed the Gholaum with a shout of delight. May the meeting be fortunate! may the eye of favour be turned on thy servant! his luck is great this day, and his head is exalted when he falls under such protection. The khan has said the truth; thy servant never had the honour to be among thy followers; but I have been with thee, khan, in the day of good and of evil, nevertheless. I was servant to Mahomed Saleh Beg, that miscreant, on the black day when the sword of treason struck the crown of glory from the brows of Iraun, and turned her day to night!—Be his father's tomb defiled! he slew the only king a brave fellow had a chance of thriving under; and now we are driven about like dogs, from heaven to hell, getting [illegible]ng but broken heads for our pains, while oth[illegible] away with the wealth and the [illegible]."

"And wert thou truly with Saleh Beg on that same day of judgment, friend?—what became of thee, then?"

"Why, what shall I say, khan;—when the troops were scattered in that great whirlwind, I, one particle of its dust, was borne away like the rest. All bonds were then broken;—master, servant, officer, and soldier, slave and freeman, were all alike confounded and amazed. I no longer belonged to any one, and free to choose, I made, as others did, the best of my market on the field. It was an evil day for the Iraunees, and with the bulk of them I took my way to join Allee Koolee Khan, in Seistan. What need I speak of the slaughter that followed of all the Shah's family? Thou knowest the tale thyself, Khan. I remained in the service of Adil Shah, till his evil destiny sunk under the rising star of his brother Ibrahim. I followed that prince into Azerbijaun, and continued his servant, until he also sunk beneath his adverse fate. It was at this time that I heard of the fame of Allee Murdan Khan, who had risen in the south, and desiring to visit these countries once more, I repaired to the presence with a party of *khoobjuans*, (stout fellows) and offered our services. With that chief I rose to the rank of a confidential gholaum; but the star of that shabby Zundee prevailed over that of the brave and open-handed Allee Murdan Khan.—Wullah! the wukeel, as he calls himself, is too much a man of the pen, too much a lover of order and peace for me. Hoossein Gholaum can only thrive, I find, in troubled times;—so I left him."

"And whither, pray, may you now be bound, friend?"

"By your head, Khan, that is more than thy servant can well tell. I have been something of a sinner in my time, and no better occupation offering, it was in my mind to go the Haj to Mushed, to pray, and make a poor offering at the shrine of the holy Imaum; and to take a look at the same time how matters were going on in Khorasan;—it is a sea that is seldom troubled with long calms. They say that the blind Shahzadeh * still keeps a court, and that the Affghaun—may his father burn!—supports him on the throne. There may be some tolerable pickings there, and among the Koords, our old enemies—and at the worst there are always travellers and caravans in the Sahrah."

"Barikillah!—excellent: a worthy mingling of motives—but times are bad, that must be allowed, and make men knaves—after all, we must eat—well, friend, I perceive thy story differs little from my own. The day has been when Ruhmut Khan did not travel with a single jeloodar, and a sorry mule with two *joals* (travelling bags); nor did he always carry his own match-lock" (casting a contemptuous glance at the weapon, which, however, he wore as one who well knew its use)—"but a man's star is not always high. 'Sometimes,' says the proverb, 'the saddle is on the back, and sometimes the back is on the saddle'—but like you, my friend, Ruhmut Khan Affshar is an honest Toork, and brooks not to see a king of beasts, be he Zund

* Shah Rokh Meerza, grandson of Nader.

or Buchtiaree, on that throne where the glorious Seffees sat, and where an Affshar ruled the world like another Chenghiz. I, too, hate a prince of Cauzees, a thief-taker and a peace-maker—a spiritless paltroon, who can laugh and joke — aye, and drink — the fellow can drink, they say, and be happy, while half the noble kingdom of Iraun remains *yaghee*,* and laughs at his beard and his *jikah*. Better off as we were, with that blood-drinker — it is true no man could count upon his life for an hour; but then the next gave him amends for his risk in plenty of hot work and plunder!"

"Aye — by the head of Allee! we had better have the Affghans among us again than the Zunds. I hate the heavy-headed asses, it is true, and they gave us some hard knocks; but then they kept our hands in at least, and our swords from rusting. And that fellow, Ahmed-Shah, forsooth!"

"Aye — *your e pidurish!* † and he was my companion! — many a hot hour's work have I seen with his Abdallees! The ghorumsaug would kiss the dust at the foot of the throne as humbly as Ruhmut Khan — and behold him now a king! — *mash allah!* — but after all he is a brave fellow, and one can't say but he deserves his luck. Why should not every gallant soldier be a king if he can. Oh my good star! hadst thou but shone that day! — but it was a black day, and an evil hour; and somehow the fortune of Ruhmut Khan was always a jade!"

"You have said it, khan, you have said it—it

* Rebellious. † Abuse.

is all *nuseeb* (destiny), or why should Ahmed be shah, and Ruhmut only khan? — aye, or Hoossein nothing but a poor gholaum — it's of no use to resist it—but what have we here—what fortress is this?"

The party by this time had advanced along the plain, towards a point where the debouch of a mountain torrent had covered the gravelly slope with large stones and rounded pebbles. It issued from a dark, savage-looking rift in a projecting mountain, close to the base of which their path led them. As they approached, the chasm opened out into a narrow but highly romantic valley, near the mouth of which, on a rocky promontory, stood the object that had occasioned the gholaum's inquiry. A wall of mud and stones, broken, but not yet very ruinous, and flanked by several round towers, surrounded the steep, and in some places scarped brow of this promontory, which stood boldly forth in the deepest recess of the glen.

Within the walls many ruins, ploughed and furrowed by the action of the weather, rose like a group of massive grey columns, and told that it once had been the habitation of a chief; and the imposing front of one large mass attached to the remains of a strong square tower, both overlooking the precipice, and commanding a wide view down the glen, distinctly showed itself as the principal hall of audience, together with the strong hold of the fort. Nor did it admit of any doubt, that the high blank wall behind, with one or two screened lattices, was all that survived of the forbidden place where the beauties of the harem were immured from the public eye.

Beneath, and on either side of the rocks and

rugged banks of this fortified promontory, which were scantily sprinkled with bushes, extended a little plain, where might be seen abundance of ruined walls interspersed with mutilated trees. Traces of inclosures and former cultivation were still visible, and the dark brown hue of the pomegranate bushes, even at that dreary season, could be distinguished, thickly spotting the sallow herbage of abandoned gardens. Willows, and a few fruit and poplar trees, bordered the water courses, and fringed the banks of the stream; but all was desolate and tenantless; neither man nor beast was to be seen. The very blast seemed to come colder down the deserted glen, as it howled over the snow, which not only covered the mountain tops, but stretched in long streaks and fresh fallen powder far down their sides.

As they opened out the view of this desolate monument of past prosperity, the khan halted for a moment, and gazing wistfully at the ruins, regarded them for some time in silence, which none of his companions saw fit to interrupt.

"That fort! — these ruins!" said he, with a sigh, replying at length to the gholaum's enquiry, "Aye, they once were the walls of a strong place, and a stout soul was he that held it: but he is gone! and they are mouldering like himself into dust!—Aye, it is the soldier's fate—the fate of all —there need not the moollahs to tell us that. But then paradise—paradise for the faithful!—the good and stout soldier—hah, Moollah? how sayest thou? Do not the girls with black eyes and green kerchiefs wait to receive us, good Sheahs?"

"Undoubtedly — certainly, khan," growled the

Moollah uneasily. "On my head be it — you will drink the sweet waters of the river Kooser, and kiss the ruby lips of the eternal virgins of paradise — but Allah kereem! Khan, this unblest hole is no place to be lingering at in such an afternoon — look at the storm that is brewing up in yon wild gully — heaven knows who may be lurking there besides — worse companions than the weather. In the name of God, let us push on, and get to that same caravanserai before the night and the darkness overtake us."

"True, by the head of my father! — the ass may sometimes bray in season," half muttered the khan — "it is no place to loiter in. Bismillah! — On, brothers — use your stirrups, friend Gholaum, and let us try to get sight of the Robaut-e Beomeid before night-fall."

"*Inshallah! inshallah! — Bismillah!*" echoed the whole party; and without another word they pressed forward with increased rapidity, until turning the bluff corner of a hill, and rising over the long undulation of gravel at its foot, the whole expanse of the plain opened out upon their view. "Behold the *Robaut!* * — behold our munzil!" said the Khan, as they gained the height, pointing towards the gloomy horizon; and all strained their eyes in the direction he indicated. But even the practised eyes of the gholaum were unable to detect the wished-for object. — "See," repeated the khan — "observe that black spot in the clouds, in a line with that grey stone — there, just to the right

* Robaut is the same as Caravanserai.

of yon bush of camel's-thorn. See that dark flattened lump upon the far-off slope of the hill."

"In the name of God, be it so!" replied the other, somewhat impatiently; "but if that be all the home we are to have to-night, our heads will be cold, I fear — why the place, whatever it be, is five fursungs off."

"No, not quite so much," said the khan; "but quite far enough to make it wise to push on: so once more, *bismillah*, use your heels!"

"But by your soul, khan," said the gholaum, breaking, after some time, the silence in which they had pursued their way, "tell me who was the owner of that strong-looking den? — what words were those you used in speaking of it, and why did you sigh so sadly as we looked upon it? — what knew you of him or of it? — by your soul, tell me?"

"Did I know him, ask you, friend gholaum? — aye, and that right well, before ever this grizzled beard — my sorrows on it, not a hummaun has it been near this month — could boast of a black hair. I knew him when he was a gallant chief — a hero — an open-handed and kind-hearted master — a most generous friend; — aye, an honest outspoken fellow he was — a true Eeliattee Toork like myself: and you know, friend Hoossein, that our thoughts are always on our tongue, and our hearts in our hand; that our embrace is as ready for our friend as our swords for our foe. Sirafrauz* Khan was a man among a thousand; — he bore himself well in troublesome times, and did

* The name signifies of exalted head or countenance.

not deserve now to have his place empty — his lamp unlighted!"

"Ahi! by my soul, you have said it, khan — it is the truth: as the poet sayeth, 'Alas and alas! that so fair a moon should ever set in darkness! — Alas for him who hath gone and left no good work behind!'"

"Aye, but such was not the case with Sirafrauz Khan. Many were the tongues that prayed for prosperity on his house, and many the hearts that blessed him. Great was his name among those who knew him — but the face and fortunes of the land have changed; and in the torrent of revolution which swept the Seffees from the throne of Iraun — which raised and overwhelmed the Affghauns, and which bore our own Nader to such a towering height of glory, yet spared him not when his hour was come — what wonder that the fortunes of a petty chief should be overthrown, and even his name obliterated. Before the days of the Affghauns, and even while they held sway at Ispahan, the riders of Sirafrauz Khan swept the country from Koom to Mushed — from Rhê to Toorsheez — nay, even to the gates of Yezd. His treasuries were filled with the goods of every country; his armouries with the finest work of Khorasan and of India; his stables with the choi[illegible] of all the Attock. Numerous brave and faithful adherents, wise in the council and bold in the saddle, bowed the head and took their seats in his dewan-khaneh; and a prince might have been proud of his stout, devoted, and well-armed band of gholaums. I myself have seen the chief at the head of five hundred picked men, all gallantly

accoutred in complete armour,* bestriding Toorkoman horses with flesh like marble, and speed and wind like that of the gourkhur of the desert. But hush — have a care! — what have we here?"

The party was just then skirting a series of low bare earthy hillocks, which formed a belt of some three miles broad between the inclined gravelly slope of the plain, and the feet of the loftier mount. ; and which, from their colour and aspect - red, yellow, and heavy grey, without grass or ish, might have been taken for the cinders and ashes of a whole range of extinct volcanoes. The quick eye of the khan had caught a glimpse of a single horseman, who, issuing cautiously from a chasm between two of these hillocks about a mile distant, after a few moments' halt, had rode on and disappeared behind another projecting inequa ty.

"S w ye yon fellow?" said he, pointing out ie object that had occasioned the interruption.

"Aye, faith! there he is in truth; but what then? - he is one — perhaps just such a stray wretch as i was r elf this morning — a traveller, like ourselves."

"A traveller! by the head of my father, such a traveller as may cut our travels short. I know the accursed spot well; — how should an honest wayfarer get in amongst that labyrinth of tupp 's? The *Beit-ul-kaizauk* is as well known on thi. road as the Chushmah-e-Zeydur of Meyome. d or the Pool-i-Alreshim at Albasabad. We

* In later days and in the same country, Meer Goonah Khan, chief of Kabooshan, could have done more.

shall be attacked without doubt; and, as you love your horse and his rider, friend gholaum, prepare to show some of that skill in the sword you talked of just now, a stout fight or a cut throat is the choice; — for these fellows make no prisoner, and the word *amaun* they know not.

Scarcely had he spoken, when the horseman reappeared along with another; and these, after riding a few paces together, were joined by a third; — all seemed to emerge from the earth like sudden births of the soil.

"By my head, you are right, khan!" replied the gholaum "these fellows want to have a pluck at our joals; they have nothing of honesty in their manner. I would we knew their strength — but that's all one — we must take them as they come. Had we not better keep further into the plain? — we should have fairer play then, and a better chance if it come to a run."

"A run, — Barikillah! if it comes to that; — a run, with our jaded beasts against their fresh ones — and on their own ground too!" said the khan, contemptuously. "No, no, friend! heels may do well in their place, but it is to hands and head we must trust just now. You have served with Nader Koolee you say: if so, you must know how to obey orders. Follow me — I know the ground; attend to my signals, help me stoutly, and *inchallah!* we shall get through the day's work."

"Chushm!" ejaculated the gholaum, with true military alertness, as, drawing himself up in the saddle he felt his horse's mouth with the bit, and pressed his side with the stirrup-iron as a hint of preparation for more active service.

"Ahi! moollah!" said the khan, cheerily, as he glanced at the disturbed countenance and cowering form of the holy man, whose equanimity was sorely discomposed by these threatening appearances — "how fares it man? What news? Fear nothing, old friend. They have not got hold of you yet, and, by the head of Ruhmut Khan! they shall not! So take heart — stick close to me — try thy stout jackass's metal — but don't get flurried like his father, before there's good cause. — Bian Koolee!" shouted he to the jeloodar, who instantly spurred to his side — "*Sauz doorvost-koon — doozd* — make ready thy arms — thieves! — Jaffer, look to your mule, and be ready with your weapon. — All of you look to me, and follow me, and avoid disorder." And the party, whatever might be the measure of their respective fears or courage, thus roused, assumed an air of alertness, and proceeded in the same order which they had previously observed.

For a full mile the strange horsemen held on their course in the same direction, but considerably a-head of the travellers. A whistle was once or twice borne to the ears of the latter on the wings of the blast; and, as their anxious eyes regained a sight of the suspicious group, after each short disappearance behind heights or irregularities in their route, they were aware that the number of their enemies had increased unaccountably to five, and then to eight. At length, they were seen to halt and cluster together, as if to hold a consultation.

"Prepare!" said the khan — "the hawks are about to stoop!" and reining up his horse, he rapidly but mechanically unslung his matchlock,

lighted its match with a flint and steel; then hanging it at the pummel of his saddle, with a vigorous movement he divested himself of his heavy barounee, which he instantly rolled up and tied to the croup. Thus disencumbered, his tall, powerful figure appeared in a close riding dress, under which glanced the plates and chains of a light coat of mail. Resuming his matchlock, he examined its priming, loosened his pistols in their holsters, felt the grasp of his sword, fixed himself firmly in the saddle—"And now, ye sons of burnt fathers," shouted he, with a grim smile, "come on when ye like!"

The gholaum, in the mean time, had not been idle. His upper garment and hood were likewise thrown aside—his carbine was ready—a small shield, which hung at his back, now covered his left arm—his head was enveloped in a snug-twisted turban, bound beneath the chin by a ply of its own stuff, and wreathed with chains of glittering steel; and the practised eye of the khan dwelt with pleasure on the compact and active form, no less than the cheerful and resolved bearing of his new ally.

"*Barikillah!* Gholaum Hoossein," said he—"there is something of old days in this. Only keep it up—let thy blows be as hard as thy shoulders are broad—and, *inchallah!* we may make these fellows cry amaun!"

"*Chushm!—inchallah! inchallah!*" responded the gholaum; "but here they come!"

In fact, at this instant, the horsemen, having extricated themselves from the broken ground, faced towards the travellers, and came forwards at

a moderate pace, which increased as they approached, to a rapid charge.

The khan, who kept a steady eye upon them as they advanced, remarked to his companion that three of them only appeared to have fire-arms: the rest had spears. "Halt here—here at this little hollow—they must charge at disadvantage across it. Now, Gholaum—now, Bian Koolee—now for the Georgian toffung—now for the Talish eye—but not a shot till I give the word."

"*Chushm!*" growled the jeloodar in reply, as he prepared his weapon for immediate work.

"Halloo!" shouted the khan, as their assailants rapidly closed, animating each other with furious shouts—"advance not a step, or three of ye die on the spot!" But, unchecked and unheeding, on they still drove, their spears protruding over the necks of their horses, and matchlocks in hand ready to lift to the shoulder.

"Mark the toffunchees!" said Ruhmut Khan—"never mind the spears—moollah, take care of yourself!" Quick as thought, as their opponents raised their weapons to the aim, those of the khan, the gholaum, and the jeloodar, gave forth their fatal contents. One ball, from the assailants, whistled past the khan's horse, and glanced upon his own armour; another flew harmlessly over their heads, as he who fired it, falling backwards from his horse, was left writhing in the dust by the frightened animal. A second of the assailants' horses floundered forward a pace or two, ere it fell head foremost, rolling over and over with its sorely bruised rider, and the rest, dismayed probably by the fall of their two comrades, pulled up a little,

and divided to right and left to reconnoitre. One of them with a matchlock, who seemed to be the leader, called aloud upon his men to "Follow him while the others were unloaded!" and they clustered together for the purpose.

"*Shumsheer-bu-dust!*"* shouted the khan, throwing his matchlock behind him with perfect coolness, and rousing his horse to a sort of capricole to get him, as it were, in hand, he drew the sword from under his saddle-flap, but permitted it to hang at the wrist by its thong, while he plucked a pistol from his holster, watching, all the time, his antagonists with wary eye and collected mind. As the foremost horseman hesitated for a moment on the bank of the hollow in front, the khan took deliberate aim, and fired: the horse of his opponent, throwing up its head at the moment, received the ball in his neck, and, staggered with the blow, fell back upon its haunches; but the rider, alertly springing from it as it fell, escaped unharmed. In the twinkling of an eye was the sword of Ruhmut Khan in his hand, and raised over the wretch's head; but, at that moment, the spear of another horseman passed through the mane, and grazed the neck of his own horse, while the shock bore him a full pace backwards. "Dog of a thief! take that!" muttered the khan, as, with one stroke of his sword, he clove in twain his antagonist's spear, and inflicted a heavy gash on the neck of his horse. The sword was raised to sever the rider's head from his body, when the chief's eye was attracted by the form of his terrified compa-

* "Sword in hand!"

nion, the moollah. This holy person, equally afraid of flying or remaining, stood cowering in stupid irresolution behind his protector, while a fierce fellow, aiming his spear at the portly figure, and striking him full in the lower part of the body, bore him right out of the saddle to the ground. The poor moollah was amply and speedily revenged; for the blow intended for the one ruffian alighted on the neck of the other, and sent his head far beyond his prostrate victim.

But the effort had left the khan himself exposed to the assaults of two enemies, who dealt him several heavy blows; while the gholaum and the jeloodar, who stood their ground with equal bravery, had each to defend themselves against serious odds. The mule-driver had drawn his sword, but seemed little likely to use it with advantage; and, to complete the chances of discomfiture to the travellers, the khan's horse, hard pressed, made a false step; and though, even in falling, its master's sword descended with effect on one of his assailants, he at length sunk to the ground entangled and helpless, at the mercy of his remaining enemy.

At that critical moment, the blast of a horn was suddenly heard, even in the very midst of the fray, and the loud shout of "Hah Dervesh! Yah Hyder!" made each party pause in their fury. Before either could comprehend whence the interruption proceeded, a crashing blow levelled the khan's assailant to the earth, and a vigorous arm, extricating the fallen chief, replaced him on his feet: the powerful form of a dervesh, clad in a scanty

keerkah,* was then seen rushing to the aid of the gholaum and jeloodar. But their antagonists did not wait his shock. Confounded and dismayed at the suddenness of the apparition, which came among them like a supernatural messenger of wrath, they turned and fled, pursued but a short way by their late opponents, who returned, at the halloo of the khan and his new ally.

"By the soul of the prophet, dervesh," exclaimed the khan, as he stood panting and gazing on the stranger—"that was help in season: ill luck to the good horse that played me such a trick for the first time: the unsanctified dogs had right nearly made an end of the old soldier. And thou, dervesh, whence art thou? it is seldom that the desert teems with such fruit when we want it—say what good angel sent thee?"

"The good and brave are ever under the shadow of Allah," observed the dervesh with unmoved solemnity—"aid was required—the lowest of His slaves was sent with it——"

"Lowest or highest, dervesh, thy aid was of the right sort, neither slow nor niggardly; and thou shalt not find Ruhmut Khan ungrateful, though there have been times when he could have shewn it more effectually."

"Enough—to work the will of Allah is its own reward; the dervesh needs no other: shew thy gratitude by thy prudence—this is no place to tarry in—incur not the penalty of folly by tempting further danger, for those may speedily appear whom it will be less easy to disperse."

* The robe of a dervish is called a Keerkah.

"By the head of Allah, thou art right; the sooner we move the better; but here is a poor servant of God that once was a moollah, and I grieve for his misfortune!"

"*Afereen!*—the moollah Mehedee?—is his term of earthly probation at an end? is the rose of his sanctity then at length gathered? *Mashallah!* the blessed Fatimah of Koom has lost a zealous servitor—after all, we are but as grass—as the flower of the field; and, praised be God! the moollah was truly full-blown!"

"Heif—Heif—he was a pious priest after all, dervesh—but—what the devil—life in him yet?" exclaimed the khan, as a convulsive movement displayed itself in one of the moollah's legs, from under the headless trunk of the man who had speared him—"Life!" growled the Jeloodar—"with a yard of this ghorumsaug's spear through his entrails!—see how he bleeds too."

"Raise him up, men—raise him up!" said the khan, impatiently—"let us see if the skill of this holy person can avail him anything—so—so—how he stares—ah! it is the fixed gaze of death! Poor moollah Mehedee!—that unsainted spear is right through his bowels—gently—gently, draw it out."

"Oh!—ah!—h—!" roared the moollah, as they proceeded with the operation—"save me—save me from that terrible ruffian!——"

"Ah—God help the poor man! his senses have left him—it is all over with him"—but by this time the dervesh had withdrawn the spear, which, to his astonishment, came forth bloodless; and a very little more examination convinced him,

that it had never entered the earthly tabernacle of the worthy moollah at all, but had been caught and deflected from his person by the thick and numerous folds of his huge kerman shawl. A little cold water, applied to the poor man's face, restored him to recollection; and the party prepared to quit the scene of their skirmish.

Of the eight marauders, three had been killed outright, and one remained sorely wounded. From the little information they could wring from him, they were led to conclude that they had been attacked by but an inferior detachment of some far more powerful band, with which there was still great danger of their falling in, the more especially as the sound of the skirmish must have reached pretty far, and the road to the caravanserai lay through the track most likely to be occupied by such plunderers. Still they had no alternative left: gain the caravanserai they must, if to be achieved by all their force and skill that night. The furosh, though an indifferent fighter, proved a good provider in his own way; for he had managed to lay hold of the horse which had carried the first of the fallen thieves; and on this the dervesh mounted with a facility, and sat with a firmness, that proved him to be no less an expert horseman, than a bold soldier. Then, leaving the dead and the wounded to the dubious care of their companions, or the tender mercies of the wolves and jackalls of the wilderness, the travellers resumed their way.

"These fellows will not fail to scent us out, Ruhmut, if we keep the open way," said the dervesh, addressing himself to the khan; "but, if thou wilt trust thyself to my guidance, I will lead

thee by a path which may keep us clear of such rencontres."

"And art thou, then, so well acquainted with these parts, as to venture such a service?" demanded the khan, with an accent of surprise; "I thought there were few, now living, more experienced in the desert roads of Betullahee than Ruhmut Khan Affshar, yet would not he, at such an hour and season, adventure on the path thou speakest of."

"Ruhmut Khan!" said the dervesh solemnly, "the power which sent me to thy aid, when another moment would have seen thy headless trunk upon the plain, will preserve thee in the dangers of the *Kuveer;* and trust thou, that he who succeeded in defeating the attempts of the robbers of the desert by day, can lead thee to thy purposed *munzil*, if the night were at the blackest."

"*Bismillah!* Dervesh—I am ready then—but, in God's name, friend, keep thine eyes open; thou wilt need them all ere we reach the Robaut-e-Be-Omeid."

"Be Chushm—have thou no fear!" replied the dervesh—"but follow me close."

Turning down the hollow, which had partially protected their front, and which crossed the line of their direct route at right-angles, they followed their new leader along the rugged bottom, which deepened as they proceeded, until its sides arose above them to a height of full a hundred feet, cut sharp and sheer through the various strata of the tenacious soil, as if an earthy wall arose on either hand. The chasm, in fact, looked like a rift in the earth; for each angle and protuberance corre-

sponded with those of the opposite sides, as if freshly torn asunder — the tufts of grass and bushes which grew on the different ledges alone betraying the deception. As they descended, they found the bottom occupied by a small rill, which gradually increased to a stream, the bed of which was their road. Along this inconvenient pathway they held their course almost in darkness, for the failing light was but imperfectly transmitted through the narrow aperture above.

After a laborious progress of a mile in distance, they observed the earthy walls diminish in height, as the level of the upper ground descended towards that of the great Sahrah; and at length they issued forth from the singular water-course, upon a damp plashy plain, in some places as white as snow, in others glimmering with the water on its surface through the lurid twilight. The gusts of the storm swept chilly and fearfully along the surface of this waste, which, utterly salt and barren, has obtained in Persia the appellation of *kuveer*, or salt desert; a term at all times associated with melancholy and desolation — sometimes with dread and superstitious horror; for the issue of a mountain torrent renders it, in some places, so marshy and unsound, as to be extremely dangerous; and whole caravans might be engulphed in its quicksands; while, on the other hand, the accidents which frequently occur to travellers have, according to popular tradition, been attributed to the ghouls and demons, who are said to infest such spots, to lure the children of Adam to destruction.

Already, as the anxious party emerged upon this dangerous ground, did they feel their horses sink-

ing over the fetlocks; their snortings betraying the instinctive dread they felt of the unsound soil. But confident in their guide, who appeared perfectly acquainted with all its intricacies, all followed him with scrupulous exactness; at times keeping close by the foot of the slope, at others, threading their way further out in the plain,—but always pressing on with great rapidity.

Thus had they proceeded for the better part of a fursung, the wind whistling in more furious gusts around them, and the clouds each moment swallowing up more and more of the hills—when a fierce blast swept keenly from the high ground they had left, bringing with it a dense snow-shower, which burst upon them in unmitigated bitterness.

"Small is our luck, to-day, friend dervesh, it seems," said the khan, after biding for awhile the pelting of the drift;—"if this snow-storm sets well in, we must smell our road to the caravanserai."

"The snow that blinds the eyes is bad," responded the dervesh; "but the sands are worse, that mislead the feet, for they shift, and some skill is requisite, even to a guide, and in day-light—but *inchallah!* I know the flows well—and God is great! There is but one spot."

"Aye, there is—that at the Kara Bulaugh."

"Thou hast said it, Ruhmut Khan; you know the place well, and all its dangers; what need to disguise them from thee—thou art wise—but God is great!"

"*Inchallah, inchallah!*—enough—on we go; the place can't be half a fursung hence; and half an hour will tell us the worst—bismillah!"

Pursuing their course over ground of a similar

character—for other path there was none—experiencing frequent alarms from their uncertain footing, and receiving many unwelcome warnings of weariness from their beasts, our travellers at length reached a spot where the rough ground, before described as skirting the hills, ran fairly down to the kuveer, without either slope or fall, and overhung it in a precipitous face of 150 feet in height. In the loftiest part of this bank there was a chasm, resembling that by which they had descended from the high ground, penetrating further backwards than the eye could reach. It was also the bed of a rivulet, scarcely larger than the former one; and at the mouth of this the dervesh made a pause.

"Look after your people," said he quietly to the khan—watch my steps;—nothing here can be discovered except by actual trial,—and that I will make myself." With these words he at once pressed his unwilling horse towards a point, where the little rill spread over the smooth sand, and striking him with the stirrup-irons, forced the animal forwards, in spite of its obvious reluctance. But scarcely had it made three steps forward, when its fore-legs sunk under it, and it fell floundering forwards on its chest.

"Allah! Allah!" exclaimed his companions.

"The quicksand has shifted," said the firm, distinct voice of the dervesh—"Back—back, all of ye—you cannot help me, but may perish uselessly with me, or accelerate my end;—try nearer the foot of the cliff;—I am just in the tail of it here."

The horse made frantic efforts to disentangle itself—but in vain—the hind-legs had broken the

deceitful crust of sand, and every plunge deepened the fatal bed it was fast making.

"*Punah be khodah!*" exclaimed the khan, throwing himself from his horse, "we are not to lose him thus!—Here, man,—here, dervesh, lay hold of this matchlock—we'll have you clear, if I die for it."

"Trust to Allah!" said the dervesh, composedly, "Keep back, and throw me a cloak;—none of you approach, as ye value yourselves or me."

By this time the dervesh had scrambled on the back of the horse, which rapidly sinking, and uttering fearful groans, or rather shrieks and snortings, could now scarcely move, and offered a momentary but steady support to its rider's foot. He had thrown off his own ragged mantle, and caught the gholaum's joobbah, which, as the readiest vestment, was thrown towards him. Folding his own, he then flung it forwards in such a manner as that it fell flat upon the treacherous sand; then springing from the back of the ill-fated horse, he lighted on the slender support, which sustained him until in like manner he had sent the gaolaum's garment, some three yards further in advance. With the same vigorous agility, he leapt next upon this, and another rapid bound placed him safe on firm ground upon the other side of the flow. All was executed with the speed of thought, so that the travellers might almost have fancied they saw some spirit of the air bounding along the dangerous surface of the *kuveer*, superior to the petty risks that affect the safety of frail mankind.

"Barikillah! Well done, dervesh, by the soul of my father! Would we could all do the like,

this poor brute included — but it is all over with him." And so, in truth, it was; for scarcely had the dervesh made his retreat from its back, than, irretrievably entangled in the heavy quicksand, and incapable of effectual exertion, it seemed to abandon itself to its fate. A convulsion once or twice shook the trembling sand, even to the feet of the bystanders; the head was once more tossed upwards; a last groan issued from the labouring chest; the wide nostril was distended by the last breath; the body sunk rapidly into the half-liquid soil; and in another moment, the head itself, falling lifeless on the sand, disappeared beneath it, leaving not a vestige to mark the spot of the catastrophe.

"Heif! heif!" exclaimed the jeloodar, with a shudder, moved at the terrible fate of an animal for which his rude nature had feelings of habitual fondness — "what a terrible place!"

"Aye, it is so," replied his master; "many of his kind have preceded him here. The flow of the Kara Bulaugh is as well known and dreaded i these parts, as the Reig Rowan of Kermaun."

"A bad munzil for any poor beast, sir," groaned the jeloodar, shaking his head. — "No crossing here, khan."

"No?" said the dervesh, who, while they gazed at the dying horse, had crossed nearer the bluff at the spot he indicated — "then how stand I here?"

"*Een che khuber-ust?* — what news is this?" exclaimed the jeloodar, aghast. "Shytaun ust! it is the devil!"

"Stand not confounded, Ruhmut Khan," said the dervesh, "but make use of that time which is

already wearing short; and trouble yourselves not for an accident, the consequence of my own presumption alone. The footing here is safe: mount and make speed: the way is now neither long nor intricate, and thou art thyself a guide."

"Nay, dervesh, but it is not thus we abandon our friends—we move not without thee: the horse of Bian Koolee is stout and long-backed—it will carry you both. By my head! thou should'st rather have my own than be left in the lurch."

"Thanks—but it needs not. I know my way, nor shall I be much behind thee at the munzil-gah. Away! use thy speed whilst thou may, lest it be cut short. Gholaum, behold thy cloak; it is but little harmed by the service it rendered me, and thou wilt require it this night." So saying, the dervesh flung the gholaum his joobba, and, waving his arm, was soon lost sight of behind a projecting cliff.

"Strange fellow!" muttered the khan, as he gazed in no small amazement at his retreating fi-.re; "but his words are wise, and we may take L advice, though we lose his guidance. Indeed, as he says, I am guide enough myself from hence, for here we leave the kuveer, and shall have the hard sahrah under our feet. Come, moollah—come, friend gholaum—lay on—lay on—let us move."

In a short while, inclining somewhat to the left, the travellers became aware that the nature of the ground had altered, from the plashy and unresisting surface of the kuveer, to the hard, gravelly slope of the plain. The heavy snow-shower had by that time also changed into a thin but incessant drift, borne on the wings of a fierce, howling

wind, which came yet more furiously from the various gulleys of the mountains. It was all they could do, chilled and jaded as both men and horses were, to keep way against the storm. Their progress was slow. The groans and gesticulations of the moollah had ceased, from utter exhaustion; silence had taken place of all conversation; each individual had enough to occupy him in his own reflections, and in keeping his weary beast from stumbling and falling. Misgivings began to arise even in the mind of Ruhmut Khan; and he was muttering his doubts and anxieties to himself, when, on the party extricating themselves from the intricacies of some broken ground, which had embarrassed them for a tedious quarter of an hour, the gholaum interrupted him by exclaiming, "We are wrong, khan — the Robaut is surely in the plain, but here we have got close to the hills again. See them rising yonder in our front."

"*That* a hill!" shouted the khan, in reply. "*Alhumdulillah!* praise be to God! — the Robaut —thanks be to God! we are right at last!" And, in fact, as they advanced, a huge, square, ruinous-looking mass rose gradually upon the sight of the travellers, growing more distinct as they neared it, and looking still more gloomy and extensive than it really was through the haze and drift of the storm.

"This way — this way, friends," continued the khan, cheerily—"we have still to gain an entrance; and then, if my old friend, Allee Seraidar, be yet in life, I doubt not of a welcome."

They rode along the face of the building, the walls of which exhibited sundry shallow arched

niches, calculated to afford a sorry but useful shelter to such unlucky travellers as could not be accommodated within, or should arrive at periods when prudence might forbid admission. And such seemed likely to prove the case with the present party; for long did they call and thunder at the closed gates before they could elicit the smallest attention. At length, a cracked and aged voice was heard struggling with the howling wind, and demanding who was there? and the khan acknowledged this proof of human presence, by shouting out, in tones that formed a striking contrast to the old man's sibillations, "Ahi! old Allee! In the name of God and the prophet, open the doors!—Here are five true believers, half dead with cold and fatigue. Come down, man, and open before we perish in your sight: come, open—open, old friend."

"And who may you be, Agas, at this late hour? and how can the old seraidar tell whether ye be honest travellers or rank thieves?"

"In the name of Allah! old man, don't throw dirt on your own white beard, and prove yourself a fool!" exclaimed the impatient khan; "descend and do your duty. Open to honest travellers—recollect the voice of Ruhmut Khan, thy old friend, and open to him and his companions."

Yet still it was not immediately that the obtuse apprehension and habitual caution of the old man could be made to receive the truth, nor was it until the khan had referred to several events of former days, in token of his identity, that the jealous suspicion of the seraidar was quieted, and he descended to admit his guests. Slowly did the heavy

old portals unfold, and give to view his withered form, as, with one assistant, he undid their cumbrous fastenings.

"*To-khoda*, man," grumbled the khan; "what a frightened old father of asses hast thou become! What sort of a cold welcome is this thou bestowest on thy friends? What's in the wind now, that the caravanserai of the good Nousheerwan is to be barred for thy silly fancies against the slaves of God it was built to accommodate?"

"*Tovah-tovah!* * Khan, forgive thy servant. By thy head! whose dog am I that I should do this? The fault, in truth, is not with old Allee; but the sahrah swarms so with evil-minded thieves, that the only way to keep my head upon its shoulders, and preserve my little stores, is to keep shut doors."

"Why, who is likely to trouble thee, old fellow? who would think worth while to let out thy half maun of blood, or to take thy khurwur of grain and bundle of chopped straw?"

"By your favour, khan, you are mistaken. Your slave would represent that the marauders of the present day are no more like the stout plunderers of old, than the sons and grandsons of Nader resembled the Shah himself, or than these evil days are like the times of the Seffies. An old poverty-stricken *capidjee* had then some chance of escape, if not of bettering his condition; but the unmanly thieves of our times would think as little of spitting him like a cat, for the sake of the half dozen *shahees* they might chance to find in his

* An apologetic expression.

scull-cap or pillow, as they would of cutting up a *kherboojah.** It is only three days since they chased an honest man and his servant up to the very doors; and if they had not heard of a caravan from Toorsheez at the back of the hill, old Allee might have had to stand siege, and see the gates of Shah Ismael burnt down to smoke him out!"

"We are on the right side of the gate now, however, old friend; and, as you say, we may as well secure it. Let us then see what you can do for our comfort: we are far travelled, and as hungry as wolves. See to it; produce your provender, and get us fire, man, for we are more than half frozen. Come, off with you!"

"*Chushm!*" quavered out the old man, with a feeble effort at former alertness, and hobbled off to perform the travellers' behests; while the party, having by this time entered the main court of the caravanserai, began, like prudent cavaliers, to look out for the accommodation of their horses, before securing their own.

The Robaut-e-Be-Omeid — very appropriately so named, was situated on a long gravelly slope, which extended from the Dooshauk mountain to the *kuveer*, above described. Placed near a point in the valley, it commanded a most extensive view on either hand, while forming itself the only object of interest or magnitude in the brown and tedious tract. Erected in ancient times by some unremembered monarch, whose munificence had happily displayed itself in works of public utility, it

* Water-melon.

was ascribed to the days of the just Nousheerwan; and it still ministered extensively to the comfort of travellers, and promoted the interests of commerce, by rendering permeable a very dangerous and inhospitable tract of country. *Hauzes*, or large covered reservoirs for water, had been constructed in certain places, at moderate distances from each other, to supply the necessities of caravans; and midway stood the Robaut, or caravanserai itself, capable of accommodating with ease in its vast vaults, numerous chambers, and large internal square, upwards of five hundred men, together with their cattle and baggage.

Most of the *hauzes* had long since fallen into decay; and even the caravanserai, in spite of the repairs it had occasionally received from powerful chiefs or rich merchants, in the spirit of gratitude, or piety, or vanity, was, at this time, in a state of lamentable dilapidation. Still, however, the walls stood firm, so that no entrance, except by the gateway, was to be gained from without; and their height rendered vain all attempt at escalade without proper apparatus, while the stout iron-clenched and plated doors, furnished by Shah Ismael, still hung on their massy hinges, enabling the tenants of the interior to defend themselves against external assaults.

Nor had the support of such travellers, as the caravanserai might shelter, been neglected by the monarch whose patriotic spirit had constructed or repaired the edifice; for not only had powerful inducements been held out to the inhabitants of the neighbouring districts to settle near it, but, in the arbitrary fashion of absolute sovereigns, colo-

nies from distant parts had been transplanted thither, to form villages in the close vicinity of this important caravanserai; and the inhabitants of the fruitful valleys and verdant mountains of Caucasus, or of the boundless pastures of Louristan, were transplanted to the barren sands and salt marshes of Khorasan, as a farmer would drive his cattle from one field to another.

But these exotic villages could subsist no longer in so ungenial a soil, than while the vigorous arm which planted them remained to nourish and support them. One by one they fell into decay, depopulated by plunder or emigration, until but a single settlement remained. It was a small cluster of families which occupied a singular insulated mound, but a little way from the mountain, in a small flat, fertilized by a rill of pure water. So remarkable was the form of this mound, that the profoundest antiquary would have been puzzled to pronounce whether it was of natural or artificial origin. Its formal shape, rising like a cylinder or frustum of a cone of some 150 yards in diameter, abruptly from the plain, with its scarped and almost perpendicular sides attaining a height of 80 or 90 feet, gave it the appearance of a huge tub placed upon its broader end; the door-ways, or windows of its semi-subterraneous dwellings, with their little rude balconies sticking out in nearly regular rows, looked like the hoops of the cask, or rather like the raised ports of a line-of-battle-ship. This produced an appearance of art, which, doubtless, was in some degree real; while the enormous bulk of the mass forbade the idea that it could owe its existence wholly to human

labour. The summit of this singular fortress was studded thickly with human abodes, and it was obvious that for a depth of thirty feet the substance of the mass was burrowed in all directions, into dwellings for its inhabitants.

To ascend this warren, or hive of human beings, would have been an enterprize very difficult to better engineers than those, who alone were likely to make the attempt; indeed, to casual observers, the entrance was scarcely discoverable. The necessary supply of water was also procured from a source within the immediate body of the place, furnished, doubtless, by the same spring as the rill we have spoken of, although no communication was to be traced. And though the plain around afforded nourishment to some fruit-trees, and yielded good crops of grain, the inhabitants derived their steadiest supply of provisions from caravans, which brought abundance from more favoured districts.

Yet, after all, the safety and even existence of this solitary village was attributable rather to the forbearance of the marauders that haunted the desert and the mountains around them, than to any resources or powers of resistance in itself: for it formed a necessary resting-place—a sort of neutral ground where negociations might be entered into, commodities exchanged, or prisoners ransomed; perhaps, where plots might be laid and intelligence communicated; where the produce and manufactures of the thieves and their families, as well as their stolen goods, might be exchanged for the arms required in their chappows; or the clothing and luxuries, in demand among the rich or extravagant of these people. Entrepots of this

description are common in such situations; and accordingly, the families who occupied this insulated spot were permitted to exist unmolested; and sometimes even to reap a little of the corn they had sowed, or fruit from the trees they had planted.

Motives of the like mingled nature, doubtless, disposed the Toorkoman plunderers to spare the old *Seraidar*, or keeper of the caravanserai, of whom we have spoken. To destroy him would be to deprive the Robaut of its comfort, and the temptations it held out to travellers; and that would cut short a principal source of plunder — for many were the rich caravans and wealthy travellers, that had yielded up their property on the way to or from the Robaut-e-Be-Omeid — and how should this continue should the road be deprived of its only accommodation.

Whispers, indeed, were not a-wanting, which accused old Allee Seraidar of maintaining, rather too good an understanding with the robbers, to be in any personal danger; and which suggested that the valuable hints occasionally extracted from him, were worth more than mere forbearance. Be that as it might, old Allee Capidjee continued, year after year, to occupy, unmolested, his little chamber in the gateway of the Robaut, to collect store of dry weeds and camels' dung for fuel, and traffic with the villagers, his neighbours, for the flour, rice, fruits, barley, and chopped straw, &c. &c., which he disposed of, at no small profit, to the travellers who lodged at the caravanserai. It was wonderful with what skill and success he contrived to secrete these stores within the various crypts of

the building, so as to expose, as little as possible to dangerous eyes, beyond his apparent poverty; and the tact with which he recommended himself and his services to travellers of every description, his plausibility of manner, his advanced age, and a certain innate air of respectability, had enabled old Allee to exist full forty years in the Robaut-e-Be-Omeid, in very tolerable comfort and prosperity; and still he swept the chambers clean, and glided about to provide for the accommodation of his guests.

"And so you have the Robaut all to yourself this ugly night, my old friend," said the khan, as at length he took his seat in a clean-swept *outaugh* (cell, or chamber), on the floor of which his furosh had thrown a couple of coarse numuds or horse-cloths.

"Not just so, Aga," replied the seraidar, interrupting a series of vigorous puffs which he was emitting from the very depths of his lungs, in the hope of inducing a spark or two to kindle some bunches of weeds, but which, after all, seemed inclined to give forth more smoke than flame — "we have already two or three guests, and inchallah! before morning, I expect a handsome supply; for the kafilah from Toorsheez should be here, unless, which may God avert! it have fallen in with those who may dispose of it otherwise — and that from Mushed to Ispahan -- of holy pilgrims — which ought to have set off twenty days ago. I took you for the advance of them, khan, at first; but when I saw armed men, and no camels — Allah kereem! my heart misgave me — forgive your old servant's mistake!"

"Well, let them come, and welcome, now we have secured our quarters. Neither priest nor moollah, hadjee nor moojetehed shall turn me out of mine. But who are your present guests?—that is most to the purpose."

"O, Aga! poor fellows, not worth your august notice—only——" At this moment distant voices were heard mingling with the unceasing storm. The old man pricked up his ears — "The kafilah! the kafilah! exclaimed he—quick, Cossim—come along!" — and leaving the half-lighted fire to its fate, he shuffled off to the gateway.

It was an arrival, but not the kafilah. Before the capidjee, in the black night, stood upwards of a dozen shivering men, all whitened with the drifting snow, and stiff with extreme cold. The chief personage of the party was an ameer, from the north of Hindostan, whose magnificent attire was sorely drenched by the storm, and whose miserable half-frozen attendants were scarcely able to descend from their weary beasts, much less to render those services which the customs of their country prescribe to so great a man as their master. In striking contrast to the ameer and his people, came next a party of Affghaun horse-dealers and merchants, whose robust forms seemed rather to enjoy than even to brave the roughness of the weather. Covered with their winter poosteens (sheep-skin pelisses), or felt cloaks, and having coarse shawls bound over their voluminous checkered turbans, they were in truth in a condition to defy the rigour of the season. Huge clumsy matchlocks, having forks of wood attached to them as rests, were slung across their shoulders; and, with the long,

straight, sharp knives, crooked scymetars, and small round shields, that might be seen hanging about their persons, indicated not less their will than their power to defend their property. They led into the caravanserai certain thick, short-legged, and very shaggy camels, whose backs bore heavy burthens; and two of their number were mounted upon large cross-made horses, and seemed of superior rank to the others; but all were independent, and each obviously accustomed to shift and provide for his own wants.

Singularly opposed to all these, appeared the spare but sinewy frame of an Indian fakeer, who had little to cover himself from the pelting storm, except a thick coat of grey ashes, with which the greater part of his person was plentifully bedaubed, and a piece of tattered black blanket, which partially enveloped his shoulders. His long matted locks were swathed, turban-like, round his head: in one hand he carried a short spear-headed staff, in the other a pair of iron tongs; and a vessel, for drinking and ablution, hung from his shoulder. This personage, instead of bustling about like the rest, as soon as he entered, to secure quarters for the night, calmly took up his position in a corner of the portal, and watched the movements of the rest in an abstracted silence, which was only interrupted by an occasional ejaculation, or one of the mystic cries into which these enthusiasts often break forth.

After a few minutes, the ameer's servants contrived to light some torches, and began their endeavours, so far as the cold had left them power, to make arrangements for the night. In this, their

master, a humane and sensible man, as it appeared, had already commenced some progress on his own account; for, after gazing round awhile, to see how matters were, he quietly made towards the chamber, where the khan and his party had contrived to kindle a most cheerful blaze. Dispensing with the ceremonious attentions of his people, he dismissed them, to look after their own comfort. "Go—go, my children," said he, "secure the best accommodations you can for yourselves and the cattle: as for me, I will beg these good people to let me warm myself at their fire." So saying, his highness, entering the comfortable chamber with an Indian obeisance to the khan, as its chief occupier, and a hearty "Salaam aleicoom!" to the company round, addressed them with—

"Worthy fellow-travellers, you will not refuse a good mussulmaun, on his way to the blessed Kaaba, the privilege of warming his limbs, which are half frozen with this wild climate of yours?"

"Aleicoom issalaum!—Khoosh omedeed! ye are welcome!" said the khan, rising from his carpet, with the honest politeness of a soldier, and advancing a step—"Enter, and be seated; our quarters are but poor, but such as they are ye are welcome to share them—come—*bismillah!*"

"*Alhumdulillah!*—your favour is great," said the ameer, "but the hospitality of you Persians is proverbial."

"We are benefited by your presence, friend traveller; and we are exalted by your favourable opinion. Well—after all we are not *hywans* (beasts)—praise be to Allah, we also are good mussulmauns, and have grace to welcome a guest.

We can see, too, when he is a man of condition — but may we ask from whence our guest has come? for it is plain that he is not an *Iroonee*."

"My lord is right — his servant is from Hindostan, a native of the province of the Doab; and he is so far on his way to perform the Haj — that duty which every good mussulmaun should keep in view. I accompanied a caravan through Caubul to Herat; but, desiring to proceed more rapidly, I pushed on with a few companions to Toorshez, and am now on my way from that place to Ispahan, if this unsainted weather will permit me: but, by the holy prophet! I see little chance of making it out — my bones are all ice already."

"Ah! Hindostan is a hot country; ye are little accustomed to the bracing climate of Iraun: we love it, even when it hugs us a little too close. But come, friend gholaum, don't spare the old fellow's fuel — heap on, and let our guest feel the comfort of a good caravanserai in a winter night — noble serais ye have in Hindostan, sir, too — but it is *heat*, not cold ye wish to shut out there."

"My lord has then seen Hindostan?"

"I have, sir; I accompanied the great Nader: with him I traversed the north of India — with him I entered Dehlee: what need I say more?"

"Ah! what indeed? Aye, you Persians played us poor Indians a sad game there; but our king deserved it all: it was a punishment for our sins — it was the will of Allah," said the ameer with seriousness; but quickly shaking off the momentary gloom, he added, "and not contented with carrying off our wealth, truly, you must rob us of all our cypress-waists and tulip-cheeks — of all

the mirth and gaiety which, after all, you brought with you. By the blessed *Kudum!* there were many wished you back again. If the hand was ever on the sword, the jest was as often on the tongue; and not a few of our own gold ashurfees did our own folks win back from the open hands of your nobles—believe me, we found ourselves dull, and spiritless when you had turned your backs."

"Barikillah!" exclaimed the khan, laughing, "may your favour increase; many were there among us, no doubt, that would gladly have indulged you, on condition of meeting no worse reception than we had the first time—but here's old Allee Capidjee to pay his respects to his new guest.—Well, old lad, here we are for the night—what can you produce to help the traveller's fare? what good stuff do these cellars of your's contain? I know they are seldom low—and my joals are but light in the way of eatables: they have come too far, and been opened too often, to have much left in their maws."

"And by the sword of Allee, khan," said the gholaum, "I swear that beyond a few crumbs of bread and cheese, and a lump of cold rice three days old, not an article have I to boast of."

"I think I may be able to help your fare a little, gentlemen," said the ameer; "if you will permit me to call in my jemadar, a poor servant of God, and a seyed too, who would give a finger, I doubt not, for one peep at such a fire as this."

"Hither, Meer Allee," said he, on receiving the company's assent—"warm thy old bones for a

moment at that blessing of a fire, while I give thee my orders." The shivering, but respectable form of the jemadar entered the cell, and was greeted by several encouraging expressions from the party; for it must be allowed that Orientals are generally kind and considerate masters; — when, after a while, his master addressed him in Hindostanee, saying, "Let my cook produce the pillau which I ordered to be preserved for my use; see that the apparatus for warming it up be quickly got ready, and let care be taken to have it properly seasoned."

"Besyar khoob khodawund!" was the jemadar's respectful reply, as joining his hands, and bowing as he spoke, he left the place to execute his orders.

The old seraidar, afraid probably of losing his own market, now informed the khan that he could produce a piece of that noble animal, the mountain-sheep, shot some days before in the Koh-e-Dooshauk, together with some eggs, dried fruits, and other stores. These valuable additions to the bill of fare were all duly committed to the care of the Indian cook; and a fire being prepared, in a time, which, though moderate in fact, appeared to hungry men an age, the smoking pillau, aided by certain savoury kubaubs and stews, was steaming upon a *sofra*, provided also by the luxurious Indian.

Scarcely, however, had the eager travellers begun to enjoy the genial meal, when once more voices were heard in the momentary intervals of the gale, and the thunders of an impatient summons resounded on the gate. A cautious reconnoisance of the new comers was not only proposed

by the seraidar, but enforced by all his guests, before exposing themselves to the risk of dangerous intrusion. But the voice of an old *catirjee*, or muleteer, well known to the keeper of this Khorasanee hostel, at once resolved all doubts, and produced an expansion of the portals — when in rushed some couple of score more of half-starved wretches, clad in a perfect panoply of ice and snow.

It was now that the old caravanserai presented a very different aspect from that which it had exhibited but two short hours before. Its vast bulk, then dark, solitary, and silent, resembled the abode of some terrific demon, whose only object was destruction, whose voice was the howling storm; now, it was brilliantly illuminated by fires and torches; its vaulted chambers rung with the cheerful voices of human beings; its stables resounded with the neighing of horses, the shrieks of mules, and the rough gruntings of camels; while its court was alive with figures in their travelling costumes, hurrying to and fro; grooms and jeloodars tending their horses, sarwans relieving their loaded camels, muffrushes and joals displaying their various hidden comforts; and the whole busy scene went on in defiance of the thick falling snow. By degrees, these groups began to lessen; one after another the dark vaults gleamed with light; and as the shadows of their new inhabitants flitted athwart the blaze, an unconcerned spectator might have amused himself with the various preparations in progress, for comforting the inward man with food and sleep.

By the time those we have described as per-

taining to the first mentioned chamber, were once in progress of completion, the seraidar again made his appearance at the entrance, and with courteous phrase and humble demeanour, begged permission to represent to the Agas, that several travellers of consideration — two in particular, rich merchants — formed part of this fresh arrival; and, that the hour being late, and no apartment ready to receive them, if their pleasure might be to admit these additional guests, to participate in the comfortable warmth of their chamber, until some other accommodation should be prepared — ?

"And, moreover, to the solid advantages of such a blessing as this, I presume?" responded the khan, whose hand was at that moment buried, knuckle deep, in the reeking pillau: "it is a serious consideration. But at such an hour—under such circumstances — what says our excellent friend?" But the ameer, who had just transferred from his greasy fingers to his open gullet a comfortably sized ball of the same savoury materials, was not at the moment in a condition to answer: their eyes, however, spoke — both were good-natured souls—the kindly sympathies of their dispositions were awakened, and their prejudices smoothed, by the pleasurable effects of the viands, and each read consent in the countenance of the other.

"Poor devils!" said the khan; "cold enough they must be. Merchants, say you—men of substance and repute?"

"Upon my head be it, khan; for none others would I dare to speak—merchants of Ispahan."

"Hah! rich no doubt. What say you then,

my Indian friend, for the best of this fare is your own?"

"I?—nay; what the Omnipotent hath freely given, shall we not share with his servants? They are mussulmauns, no doubt?—"

"By your soul, Aga, what doubt of that? two of them are mussulmauns—nay, one a Hadjee—"

"How? there are more, then? What? Franks? Kaffers?—"

"The khan has said it—a Kaffer truly, but an Armenian of great respectability and wealth: they always travel together."

"Hum!—an Armenian? a hog! a dog!"

"Truth, Aga; yet, after all, he is a man, and this is a caravanserai—"

"True, true, old friend; what saith the poet—'The world is but a caravanserai, where each man occupies his chamber for a season.' Let him seek to do so without offence to his neighbour, or evil report to himself. Admit even the Armenian."

Accordingly, the three shivering merchants were admitted, and, after the usual civilities, took their seats near the fire, which once more was replenished with the crackling and blazing fuel. Two were portly men, enveloped in thick fur cloaks and huge turbans; and the solemn importance of one instantly betrayed the hadjee to the knowing eyes of the khan and the gholaum. The other, although characterised by that gravity of demeanour which belongs to the commercial profession, displayed less assurance and presumption. The Armenian, one of an oppressed and despised race, notwithstanding a just consciousness of superior intellect as well as wealth, prudently or habitually assumed

an air of irresolution and timidity—the invariable characteristic of his people in their dealings with, or even in presence of, mahometans of rank. Even the general welcome and invitation which all received, was tendered to him in a tone of haughty condescension; and he scarcely dared, as it seemed, to bring his unclean and unholy person within the atmosphere of the tyrants of his country.

"Approach, merchant," said the good-natured khan, softening, as he watched the shudder caused by the freezing air from the entrance convulse the spare form of the christian — "approach, thou art cold: make thyself warm, man, and allay thy hunger. Come, thou art freely welcome, and thou canst stomach a good pillau, I warrant."

"May your favours increase!" responded the hadjee, taking up the word, and assuming a tone which was intended to conciliate his hosts, and yet not to offend his companion. "Draw near, Khojah — these good mussulmauns are content that thou, a friend of ours, should share our good fortune. Khojah Catrapeet, gentlemen, is a modest and prudent person, who comprehends how to conduct himself in good company, or he should not be the comrade of Hadjee Hafiz, of Ispahan; and he is known, let me tell you, as a good man, in every bazar and bunder, from Dehlee to Istambol."

In spite of the habitual endurance of his nature, and all his command of countenance, the Armenian could not altogether suppress a glance of indignant contempt as he listened to the equivocal eulogium pronounced by his gross and time-serving companion, even while he obeyed the summons; and

seating himself in the full influence of the blaze, received, upon a separate dish, from the hands of the Indian ameer, a portion of the still smoking pillau. In another moment, the knuckles of the others met in the savoury messes, in contact with the still busy fingers of their entertainers.

The earnestness of an occupation so congenial to all parties absorbed every faculty so completely, that not a word was uttered, nor a sound to be heard, except the workings of the jaws of those engaged, or the low breathings and emphatic grunts of satisfaction, as the gnawing discomfort of cold and hunger gave way before the gentle delights of repletion. But the longest meal, as well as day, must have an end, and the most capacious maw will at length cry, " Hold, enough !" The khan and ameer had raised their bodies from their recumbent position over the steaming dishes; the gholaum, with the perseverance of a prudent soldier, who knows not what the next day may give forth, continued stowing away the good things a little longer; but the hadjee beat them all hollow. Bent double over the fragments of his food, it seemed as if he had abandoned all idea of assuming a more erect posture; nor was it until he felt that the observation of the whole party was upon him, and that he must be noted as a flagrant defaulter against the rules of good breeding, that he chose to raise his eyes with an affected start of surprise. With an audible expression of regret at abandoning so pleasing a pastime, and a strong guttural *Alhumdulillah*, he then also settled back his portly figure, wiped his greasy fingers upon a fragment of bread, finished, without com-

pleting the operation, with a most filthy rag — and took up his position, prepared either for question or reply, as soon as conversation should begin.

But no great disposition for conversation appeared among the party. The fatigue of a long journey, and buffeting of the wind, combined with the tranquillizing effects of a full meal and a calleeoon, as well as the lateness of the hour, to cast over every man a veil of lethargic dullness. Eyes began to reel in their sockets; a head here and there was seen to fall upon the breast; and by common consent carpets were stretched, and quilts produced by the luxurious, while others merely rolling their cloaks more closely around them, stretched themselves out upon a horse-cloth. The merchants retired to their own chamber, and resigned themselves to rest. By degrees not a sound was to be heard throughout the wide caravanserai, save the deep snore of a sleeper, the occasional hinney of a horse incommoded by its neighbour, or the gurgling of a camel as he rolled the fleshy substance from his stomach under the irritation of thirst, or hunger, or fatigue. The fires one by one became extinct — darkness as well as silence prevailed; but the wild howlings of the storm continued unabated, and the air was still filled with a fierce and constant snow drift.

The long December night passed on unheeded by those who slept the deep sleep of weariness; but morning broke upon a dreamy spectacle. The open area of the caravanserai was covered deep with the snow, which lay equally thick upon the vaulted roof, save where the whirlwind had torn it off; and every chamber and niche that had not

been artificially closed by its tenants, was filled by the drifting clouds that flew in all directions. Nor were there any hopes of speedy abatement; for so thick were the falling flakes, that no eye could pierce the dusky atmosphere. It was a terrific storm!

Slowly did the travellers rouse themselves from their warm lairs to gaze upon this disheartening spectacle. Situated in a vast expanse of desert — on all sides far removed from a peopled tract, how were they to venture from their present shelter, or attempt to proceed on their respective routes? Such were the anxious considerations which occupied the minds of the party we have described, as they mustered together in the morning with that indefinite hope of comfort in each other's presence which frail human nature experiences in the hour of difficulty or danger.

"Desperate weather, this, gentlemen!" observed the gholaum to the khan, who with the Indian ameer had shook up their carpets, and spreading them afresh, were engaged in their morning numauz — "terrible weather—sorely against our proceeding — what say you, khan?"

"Aye, terrible weather, truly—our luck is somewhat deficient on this occasion," responded the khan, tugging at his beard with a very sorry bit of much-worn comb, as he sat in a contemplative attitude in the intervals of the set form of prayers — "but, Shookhur khodah! we have a stout roof over our head—and my affairs are none of the most pressing."

"Nor mine, heaven knows," said the gholaum, seating himself with his hands stuck in his waist-

belt—"but thou knowest, khan, that the beleaguered garrison can exist no longer than while provision lasts—and it seems to me that there are mouths enough here to swallow up all our stores before we are relieved."

"Aye, we can't look every day for such a pillau as we had yesternight by the favour of our friend there, and which raised both my stomach and spirits from the depths of despondency; but still there must be some good stuff in all that load of baggage—we shan't starve, inchallah!"

"No, inchallah! we need not starve—thanks be to God, there is camel's-flesh and horse-flesh enough if it comes to that, and plenty of snow-water, too—but by your favour there is one thing you have forgot—what sort of weather will this be without fire? and where is there fuel for so many?"

"Punah-be-khodah! you say true!" observed the ameer, starting from one of the assumed fits of abstraction which enter into a Mussulmaun's devotions—"meat and drink may be had; but what are we to do for fire? In my country a good *rezai**, and a shawl or two, and ye might bid defiance to the coldest blast that ever blew there: but here—by the holy kaaba! it is the father of cold—nothing but snow, snow, snow!—by the head of the prophet! sir gholaum, I participate in your alarm!"

"Behold! here come a pair who seem resolved to bid defiance to the cold of Kâf itself, if fur and shawls may do so," said the khan, laughing, as the hadjee and his commercial friend approached the cell, enveloped in kuleejahs and poosteens, and

* Quilt.

wrapped in shawls and coverings so completely, that they did in truth seem qualified to brave the north wind itself, loaded as it was with bitterness from the deserts of Tartary, and the frozen regions of the Poosht-i-khur.

"Astafferullah! gentlemen, here's an unsainted day!—here's a goodly time for us poor slaves of Allah to cross the cothul-e-karcheh—which, by the blessing of God we purposed to have done this identical and most unlucky day!" Thus growled the hadjee, in the voice of sanctimonious importance, which, in common with many of his class, he usually affected.

"You have the more chance of escaping those enemies of all trade but their own, the Toorkoman and Jahjermee robbers, hadjee," replied the khan, with an arch smile—but pardon me—you are probably well prepared to resist such servants of the devil—eh, hadjee?"

"Ahi!—no, no, no—may the souls of their fathers burn—God forbid that we should meet—the unsainted dogs have no regard for the stuff that hadjees are made of—little chance of escape should we have, were we unluckily to fall in with them. If our routes, noble khan, lay in the same direction, the benefit of your company and convoy would be highly prized by your servants—we hear your valour made a gallant defence only yesterday.

"Ah—a brush—a brush, to keep our blood from freezing—we soon dispatched them."

"La illa-illullah! what it is to be a soldier!—to repose under the shadow of your arm, khan, would be happiness and safety—if any considera-

tion——" he stopped, as if fearful he had gone too far.

"Oh, we can talk of that afterwards; at present we are in safe quarters, and the rogues can't keep the sahrah in this weather; but whence does your reverence come?"

"Your servant is from Ispahan, by the way of Chardeh — and a vile route we had across the kuveer — but it was reported free from the vile race of thieves, whom may God confound!"

"And you purpose to go — ?"

"To Herat, inchallah, by the way of Toorsheez."

"And I —"

"Not one step from hence to-day, Agas, if it were to the blessed Durgah itself. I would represent, in your services, that neither man nor beast could live for an hour in the sahrah in such weather; here's old Ismael Katerjee will tell you the same. — What say you, brother? These Agas are talking about the road."

"The road? what word is that? who speaks of the road, and the snow a guz deep since yester-evening?" growled the old muleteer. "Give thanks to God rather, that ye have the old Robaut over your heads, and examine your stores; think of husbanding them well, that we mayn't all die of hunger and cold."

"What!" exclaimed the ameer and the merchants in a breath, "do you think the storm will last any time?"

"I have no thoughts about it, Agas; I am certain we are in for a week of it, and Allah only can tell if it may break up then. Ye might have seen the clouds yourselves on the skirts of the Koh-e-

Dooshauk, and on the low range of Durreh: they never were seen there without a week's bad weather. And coming at this time too! — at the winter solstice! *La illah-il-ullah!* we shall be well off with a fortnight's continuance."

"*Punah-be khodah!* man, what say you? — a fortnight? Why, we shall all be eating our own flesh, after consuming thy mules! *Allah-il-ullah!* a fortnight!"

"Aye, Agas," replied the old seraidar, calmly, "he has said it, and it is truth. These storms in this dreary sahrah, and its black kuveer, are fearful things; but these old eyes have witnessed the whole of that great plain, which, if the storm would permit, you might see from the roof of the Robaut, all white with glittering frozen snow, for six weeks — aye, two months together at a stretch, without an hour's thaw; and as for the caravanserai, none but a bird could approach it."

"*To-khodah kumbucht!* don't breathe such evil words—we shall all be dead!"

"God forbid, Aga! God forbid! — things are not so bad yet. But, for this storm, rest assured that there will be no stirring hence these many days to come. There was a man down from the village here yesterday, and he brought word that the Chushmah-e-Hoossein has been getting red since ten days past, and when he came here it was like blood."

"And what may this Chushmah-e-Hoossein be?" enquired the hadjee.

"And what may its red colour prognosticate?" demanded the ameer at the same moment.

"Ahi! Agas: and can it be that such learned

and noble persons as your excellencies have never heard of the famous fountain of Hoossein, which lies among the hills, not three miles distant from the village yonder? I am sure the khan there — may his house prosper! — is well acquainted with what his servant says."

"*Belli, belli* — yes, certainly," responded the khan, with a solemn shake of his head.

"But, after all, what is it, khan? — by your head, inform us!" said the ameer, eagerly.

"Nay, there is old Allee, who knows the whole story — let him declare the truth: speak, my old boy — enlighten these gentlemen."

"May your favour increase, khan! I will tell what I know, and what is well known to all the country. You must know, Agas, that in the days when the evil-minded Moaviah and his accursed son — may they burn eternally! — rebelled against the true faith, and repudiated the authority of the lawful successor of the prophet, (on whose name be blessings!) the excellent and exalted Allee, the Lion of God, the pillar of Islam! — I trust that all who hear me are worthy sheahs!" and the old man cast a glance of some inquietude around his auditors. "Alhumdulillah!" intonated the hadjee — "By the favour of the Most High!" ejaculated the merchant — "What doubt is there of that?" exclaimed a third: while all, except the Indian ameer, uttered some pious expression of assent — and he, probably an orthodox Soonee, like many of his countrymen, finding himself in the minority, prudently kept his own counsel.

"Well, Agas, during this unholy quarrel, two servants of God, mussulmauns — for by that time

the land of Iraun had been enlightened by the blessed lamp of Islamism — were travelling this road, and chance led them to the fountain of which I speak, which was then, according to tradition, a well of limpid water. They had eaten together in peace, and, as evening fell, were performing their ablutions, and preparing for the *Numaz*, when one, looking at the other, observed that, in performing this duty, he deviated from orthodox rule. He made the remark, and was told by the stranger that he himself was in error; and he took his companion roundly to task for such unauthorised and heretical innovation. The argument commenced in friendly shape enough; but as it proceeded, the dispute ran high, and it appeared that one was of those who regarded Allee as the rightful successor of the prophet, while the other supported the title of the three khaliphs.

At length, the friend of Allee, enraged at the impious expressions of the other, broke out into contemptuous abuse, and imprecated curses on Abubekr, Omar, Moaviah, and all his race. Furious at the well-merited insult, the other started up, and drawing his sword, exclaimed, "Allee is dead, like a dog as he was, and may God grant that it be with his sons and whole race as with thee this moment!" With that, he smote his antagonist on the neck, so that the head flew off, and fell into the fountain, where it floated for a moment, and the lips were heard thrice to exclaim, 'Ai Hoossein!' Agas, it was the very hour—nay, the very moment—when the blessed Hoossein himself was drinking the sherbet of martyrdom from

the hands of the accursed Shimmur! A fearful storm, which had been gathering unheeded by the disputants, burst at the moment of the murder, proclaiming the wrath of the Almighty at the impious deed; the fountain, tinged with the blood of the slain, retained its ominous colour until the heavens were again serene; and ever since, when a storm is at hand, the bloody stain returns, and foretells the approaching tempest. Such is the story, Agas; and you may from thence judge how much reason your servant has to predict the continuance of this storm.

"*La illah-il-ullah!* God is great! what a wonderful story! and, no doubt, perfectly true!" exclaimed the hadjee, in his guttural tones: "many such facts have come to my knowledge, which teach a similar lesson. But what became of the murderer, my friend?—what was his punishment? Great must have been the ashes heaped upon his head."

"Great, indeed, O hadjee, as well he merited—it is said, that horror-struck at his own deed, and confounded at the fearful tokens of divine wrath which appeared around him, he fled from the place, and wandered about the hills as a madman, exclaiming constantly, 'Ai Hoossein! yah Hoossein!' until at last he was found dead upon a spot, where a huge heap of stones is shewn, still known by the name of *Goor-e-mullaoon*—'The grave of the accursed.'"

"*Aajib!*—wonderful! what a tale! what an event! God is great! *La illa-il-ullah! ya Hoossein! ya Hyder!*" Such, and many similar exclamations, were ejaculated by the bystanders, on

the conclusion of the seraidar's narrative. "But there sits the khân," observed the ameer—"what says he to all this?"

"*Che airuz bekunum?*—what can I say, friends?—you have heard the story—truth is truth—that the Chushmah-e-Hoossein does exist in this neighbourhood is known to me as to others—and it is certain that these things are related of it—further I know not, never having been at the place—but here is one, who no doubt can tell you more." In saying this, his eye fell on the tall sinewy form of the dervesh, his ally of the previous evening, and he accosted him eagerly—"By my soul, dervesh, thou art welcome—thy place has been empty—believe me, I feared for thee last night—it was a rough time, and thy fare must have been sorry enough—say what became of thee?"

"He who walks under the shadow of the Most High, fears neither cold nor want," said the dervesh, with his accustomed solemnity—"the worm which he protects is greater than the dragon that defies him."

"Thou art right, dervesh—who can withstand the power of the Almighty?—his breath scattereth armies, and princes are as the dust of his footstool!—but by thy soul, inform these servants of God—declare to them the truth of the Chushmah-e-Hoossein, and its storm-foretelling virtues."

"The tale that has been told, is true," replied the dervesh—"the power of Allah is in the fountain of Hoossein, and those who distrust its predictions will rue their obstinacy. For ten days to come, neither man nor beast may quit these walls

with hope of safety — so let those who are within them prepare for so long a residence."

"Aye, Agas — the dervish speaks like one gifted with the wisdom of *Solymaun ibn Daood*; — and old Allee is the man to declare what is needful — pardon the presumption of thy servant, Agas, but experience maketh heedful — ye are now many here, and your cattle are also numerous — without careful management, the provisions ye possess, or which your servant can produce, would soon be consumed — and then for fire — *Allah-il-ullah!* what are men to do in such weather without fire? yet all we can command is a few dried thorns and weeds, and some cakes of dried dung! — Listen then, Agas, to the advice of your servant: — Close to the gateway there is a large apartment, in tolerable repair; a few mats or numuds will shut out the blast: thither let the khan, the ameer and his friends, the hadjee, and merchants with their parties, and as many as the place will comfortably contain, take up their quarters — one fire will then serve to warm them, and a dish of pillau, when served up to so many, will go further than if divided into portions. The same arrangement must be observed by your followers, the muleteers and others. Crowded together, ye will keep each other warm — thanks be to God, there are no women to set us a fighting — and, *inchallah*, both fuel and provisions may thus hold out, until the sahrah is once more open."

"*Barikillah!* old Allee — by the soul of my father, thou hast spoken like a moollah," said the khan — "by my good-will we shall follow thy counsel."

"*Kabool*—I agree with the khan," said the ameer—"the plan is excellent—the case is clear—there is not a word to be said."

"Aye," growled the hadjee—"the counsel may be good, but it must be adopted with discretion—we must choose our companions—all are not to be admitted indiscriminately—*Mashallah!* we are somebody—we love not that churls and *yaboos* should sit upon our skirts, and thrust their fingers into our dish!"

"*To-khodah*, hadjee, if hadjee thou beest, thou art less than wise to utter such words," exclaimed the khan, impatiently—"What, man! hast thou never heard the story of the moollah and the bear? Listen—The holy man was wandering in a wilderness, where, seized with the pangs of cold and hunger, he bewailed his hard fate, that he should die before he reached the point of divine absorption at which he aimed—his complaints reached the ears of a bear, who invited him to his cell, and placed before him fruits and wild honey. 'Thy fruits,' said the moollah, 'are excellent and lawful, friend bear—they are the free gift of Allah; but I fear thou hast played the rogue about this honey—thou hast stolen it from some hive of miserable bees, who are now in distress about it—it is not, therefore, lawful to be eaten.' The bear marvelled to hear a hungry man speak thus, but said nothing—'And where are my quarters for the night?' quoth the moollah.—'In this hole with me,' replied the bear.—'But I see no mattress nor quilt to cover me, friend—and what is a man of my sanctity to do among all these ill-looking cubs?'—'They are my children,'

quoth Bruin, 'and they will keep thee warm — no other covering have we but this warm fur coat the comfort of which I will bestow, so far as I can, on thee, and my children will do the same.' — 'Pretty hospitality, this!' said the moollah — 'to think I am to rub shoulders with thy rough skin and greasy cubs — no, no, that I can never consent to; I must have a place to myself.' — 'And a place for thyself thou shalt have, thou unblest fool,' growled the bear — 'the wide sahrah is before thee — choose thy own path — an thou refuse the best I have to give thee, thou shalt starve before I or my cubs trouble themselves more about thee or thy wants.' So the bear turned out the foolish moollah, who perished in the cold — and so will we thee, friend hadjee, if thou beest such a father of asses as he was."

The hadjee, thus schooled, growled out his excuses, and the whole party followed the old seraidar to the apartment near the gate, which had already been swept out; and a blaze was soon made that dispelled all damp and dreariness. Mats and numuds were produced and spread, or hung so as to exclude much of the cold sifting wind; and the company were soon established in very tolerable comfort. Several strangers next made their appearance, to partake of the benefits of this arrangement. Calleeoons were called for, and the capidjee summoned to declare the state of his commissariat resources; and although the old man was chary as to particulars, no inconsiderable comfort was derived from his replies.

"We shall not be so very ill off, after all," observed he — "the people of the village, knowing

I looked for the caravan, brought me down several *khurwurs* * of grain and chopped straw yesterday, together with a parcel of wheat flour, butter, oil, tallow, and fresh-killed meat — I had a little dried flesh in the place — a merchant, whose camel gave up here a month ago, left with me a load of dried fruits from Herât — I have a bag or two of fine Mazunderaun rice, and some sugar from Bunder-abbas — but, after all, prudence is every thing, Agas — let us be wise — let us be careful; — then there is plenty of that capital Tubbus tobacco, which the hadjee is smoking in that calleeoon there, and which is like the water of life to the soul — Ah! *inchallah*, we shall do, Agas — we shall do."

"*Inchallah! inchallah!*" responded all — and the calleeoons were plied with double vigour, and the fire heaped up; and the *choghas*, and the *joobbas*, and *barounees* were drawn tighter, as the keen blast whistled with increased violence through the apartment, and a few snow-flakes were wafted in through the openings left for air and flight.

"But what shall we do to pass the time?" exclaimed one, as conversation rather flagged for lack of subject — "it is a dismal long while to spend, without a word of news, or a turn to the bazar, or even crossing a horse, and riding a *meidaun*. Ah! if all had but a *kissago* here ——"

"Aye, a kissago — there would be some good in that, certainly."

"Well, and who knows," said another, "whether we may not have a good story-teller among

* Asses' loads.

us all — there's a goodly number in the place — let us proclaim a reward to any one who shall tell us a good tale."

"*Barikillah!* an excellent idea — no doubt we shall have plenty of offers — we may as well, at the same time, offer a reward for the best cassedeh, or quartet in poetry — we shall then have a contest of wit and genius to warm the old Robaut."

"Why should we not be our own kissagoes?" said a third — "surely there are here amongst us several whose beards have not become grey, nor their teeth old for nothing — they must have seen and heard enough to talk about — their adventures would surely furnish many a tale."

"Good — good," cried two or three voices — "let every man tell his own history — nothing can be better."

"Wullah! notable tales we should have, at any rate," growled another — "no, let us examine a little, and choose such from among us as may be likely to give us most amusement."

"Stay!" said the gholaum — "listen to me — I know one who can amuse us if he pleases. — Khan, by your soul, let us hear something about that stout leader, of whom you spoke yesterday, as we passed the valley and the Kallah Feerozeh."

"What, Sirafrauz Khan Byaut?"

"Aye, the same — you may remember saying enough to excite my curiosity."

"Who seeks to hear of Sirafrauz Khan?" demanded the dervesh, who had risen to his feet, and advanced among them as soon as the gholaum had spoken — "his name was exalted in the days that

are past; and though the star of his fortune has set, and his lamp no longer burns, let no vain babbler throw dust upon his memory, or defile his grave."

"By the soul of my father, Dervesh, the hand of Ruhmut Khan would sooner cleave the head of such a babbler, than utter with his tongue a word that could blemish the fame of the brave and noble chief of whom we speak — he was mine ancient friend, my patron, rather than my companion in arms; and evil befall the house of him who forgets the debt of salt or of kindness."

"Ruhmut Khan," said the dervesh, "thou art fair and honourable; and I know that thou wilt report of the chief, according to truth — it may be that the dervesh knows something of him too — should thy memory fail, he can aid thee in a tale of gallant deeds."

"Nay, dervesh, tell thou the tale — by the head of Allee, the business of Ruhmut Khan is not that of a story-teller — he can fight or listen better than he can rehearse, and thy brethren are generally excellent kissagoes."

The dervesh shook his head and waved his hand, as he resumed his seat — "Enough, Ruhmut Khan — thou art honest — the fame of the chief of Byaut is safe with thee — let the assembly be delighted with thy tale."

"*Barikillah!* well spoken," dervesh, exclaimed many voices — "*Bismillah!* let the khan begin."

"Well, well, my friends, since it appears to have fallen to my share to commence the entertainment of the day, and as there seems a wish that Sirafrauz Khan shall be the subject, I shall

endeavour to content you. God forbid that we should have to remain here long enough to discuss the whole history of that chief,—and God forbid I should be forced to tell it — but there are some circumstances within my own knowledge connected with his family, which interested me much; and, as they may prove amusing to the company, I shall endeavour to relate them.—You must know, gentlemen ——" But though the style and manner of the khan might be admirably suited to his auditory, who at every fresh pause honoured him with unbounded applause, it occurs to us that we shall better consult the taste and comfort of European readers, by narrating the story after our own fashion, and in our own words.

THE KHAN'S TALE.

THE KHAN'S TALE.

CHAPTER I

THE BUST.

THE hour of morning prayer was past, and the courts of the Kallah Feerozeh began to exhibit a busy and stirring spectacle. In the principal square was mustered a numerous troop of mounted men, many of them grim veterans, whose faces, seamed by scars, and blackened by exposure, with the plain but purpose-like condition of their arms and apparel, betokened not only length of service and acquaintance with toil and peril, but their fitness to meet it. These formed a striking contrast with the younger cavaliers, whose gay equipage and prouder carriage betrayed the joyous hopes of youth and the buoyancy of spirits unbroken by misfortune, unacquainted as yet with failure or defeat. Around were groups of women and children, some gazing on the troops with eyes of delight and admiration, others with anxiety and sorrow painted in their looks; and a curious observer of the human countenance might have distinguished the wife and mother by the earnest gaze of the half-veiled eye,

the quick and eager exclamation, the infant strained to the throbbing breast, or the hand stretched forth to point the loved one out to the child of his hopes and pride. nor could he have mistaken the speaking silence of those slighter forms, who, shrouding their faces with maiden timidity, strove in vain to conceal their agitation, suppressed the sobs which convulsed their bosoms, and hid the tears which durst not flow in public. On these did many an eye turn with a keenness of interest that needed no interpreter, and many a heart beat high beneath the steel mail-plate, as, even amid the tramp of the impatient war-horse, and the clang of preparation, tokens of secret affection were furtively interchanged.

Without the gate stood a still greater crowd, some in the garb of war, holding powerful horses, whose furniture and equipment declared the military and arduous character of the expedition for which they were destined. Among these horses were many *yeducks*, (or led horses,) and the garb and aspect of those who had the care of them at once indicated them as jeloodars, or principal officers of the stable, and confidential attendants. Groups of tall spears stood leaning against the gateway; others, with little pennons, were here and there stuck in the ground, beside a shield or bundle of arms and necessaries; parties of men, armed and equipped for the field, strolled here and there, calling aloud on their companions and friends, or chiding their leaders' delay, or loudly boasting of their purposed acts. Women, with busy kindness and forethought, appeared hurrying about with articles of food or comfort for horse or man; idlers loitered in groups around, gazing at a scene which was, however, no novelty at the Kallah Feerozeh; and the hum of various feelings,

the shout, and the laugh, and the taunt, mingled with tones of objurgation, of remonstrance, or of distress, amidst the clang of arms and the neighing of horses.

The gateway itself was the theatre of a constant bustle: persons of every rank and sex hurried in and out, traversing the large or outer square, in one side of which was the *dur-khaneh*, or gate, leading to the hall of audience. The chambers above and on either side of this gateway, as well as its immediate approaches, were filled with groups of a different character. These were principally composed of magistrates, or ketkhodas of villages, and elders or heads of tribes who had repaired to the fortress at the summons of their chief, or for the purpose of paying him their homage. Some, clad in handsome cloaks or barounees, which, when pushed or blown suddenly aside by the wind, discovered the armour of the wearer, were doubtless officers of the troops mustered without, prepared to mount at the first signal of their chief. Others, clothed in homely garments—old men, with white beards, real *reish suffeeds*—were as obviously men of peace—fitted for the council, perhaps, but certainly past work for the chappow. Moollahs, too, were among them, with their sober gait, huge turbans, and heavy *pooshteens*, thrusting their important faces everywhere, to gather in the news and gossip of the day, or to watch their opportunity of turning events to their own advantage. The eager anxiety or serious reflection which might be read in the faces of most of those assembled at this point, betrayed the operation of some powerful excitement; and the hum of many voices arose as each expressed his opinion of the contemplated enterprise.

"But are you sure," observed one, with strong

emphasis—" are you so very sure that it is against Baum you are to proceed? There has been little work of that sort with the Koords of Mianabad of late — what has lighted the fire now?"

" Who talks of Mianabad?" interrupted another —" what business have we there just now, when the whole of Toorsheez is overrun by these Karawees? This is the third Kafileh they have taken at our doors—whose dogs are they that we should suffer this insult?"

" Aye, and when the Toorkomans of the Attock are sweeping off the flocks from Bans-Muhuleh, and the people themselves from Nishapour!" observed a third.

" The arrow has hit the mark; assuredly, these Toorkomans need punishment, and our khan is the chief to put the rope about their necks!" said another, in a decided voice.

" La illah-ilullah! what folly is that?—where is Kallah Feerozeh, and where is the Attock? Has the khan wings, that he should fly over Koordistan —how else should he reach the Goorgaun or Attruck?"

" Times may be changed," replied an old man, whose well-scarred face betrayed the soldier of many fields; " but old Dada Beg has seen the day when feet and hands alone were required to sweep over Koordistan and the Attock, and when these unblest Zafferanloos, with their Toorkoman allies, would fain have had the wings to flee with—we were like hawks after pigeons in those days."

The clatter of feet from within interrupted these remarks, and announced the approach of a person of consequence; and all rose up, and assumed more ceremonious attitudes, as the vizier, or principal meerza of the khan, followed by many attendants, came forth from the inner court. Slightly,

but civilly, returning the salutes of the company, this representative of the great man took his seat in one of the chambers of the gateway, and received petitions, or conversed with those around him, until a *yessawul* or usher came in haste to announce that the audience was about to begin.

"The khan is coming from his underoon," said he, "and desires your attendance—be pleased to proceed thither."

At this moment, an officer approached from the outer gate, and saluted the meerza with a military obeisance. "I beg to represent, in the service of the khan," said he, "that three persons have just made their appearance at the gate, and desire to be admitted on particular business to his highness."

"Business!—particular business! as if we had not enough on our hands already just now!" muttered the meerza: "know you who or what they are?"

"May it please you, they are strangers to your servant."

"Well, let them approach: but if they are *fuzools*, and come to plague the khan with trifles, at such a time, tell them he will surely burn their fathers."

The strangers, who now entered, were all plainly habited, and armed after the fashion of the country, like men prepared either for peace or strife. Two of them were of middle size, and in no degree remarkable either in feature or expression; but the attention of all was drawn to the third, who appeared to be the chief of the party, and whose aspect was singularly forbidding. His tall gaunt figure displayed a round and ill-shaped back, swelling into shoulders of uncommon breadth; and a chest of more than ordinary depth was united

to a waist slender almost to deformity. A lean but sinewy neck supported a head more suited to an *afreet* or *goul*, than one of the sons of Adam; for the blood-shot and protuberant eyes glared from beneath a forehead of great expansion, but falling strangely back from the heavy brow; and the prominent form of the nose and mouth completed a disgusting resemblance to some one of the brute creation, relieved only by a certain expression of intelligence, which, though sometimes degenerating into cunning, and at others obscured by ferocity, betrayed the existence of *mind* in this unprepossessing exterior. Still, the impression made upon the beholder by this singular personage, was so decidedly unfavourable, that few ever thought of denying his full right to the name by which he was usually known, of *Goorg** Allee beg, bestowed on him as a soubriquet from his supposed likeness to that fierce beast of prey. On the present occasion the individual in question seemed unwilling to display the full extent of his deformity; for his forehead was covered with a large turban, and the lower part of his countenance was swathed in the folds of a shawl, which also hung loosely round the upper part of his person, so that the description we have given applies rather to his real appearance, than to that which he at this time presented to the beholders.

Such were the trio who were now introduced at the dur-khaneh of Kallah Feerozeh, and who cast their eyes around them, scanning the ranks of horsemen in the square with a gaze of scrutiny and suspicion that attracted the notice of all.

"By the khan's salt!" whispered the officer to the meerza, as he marshalled his charge before him

* Goorg, is a wolf.

— if these fellows are honest men, may I never draw sword again!—they are spies, or my name is not Atta Koolee. If they have not counted every man in the meidaun, then have I eaten dirt — and as for the horses, they could tell them all by head-mark."

"Spies!" repeated the meerza—"have they no regard for their necks? Whose dogs are they, then, to come hither and spit on our beards? — let us examine them strictly."

But although the meerza employed his utmost ingenuity to discover who they were, and what their business might be, the caution of their principal defeated his efforts, and, accordingly, they were detained in custody in the gateway, until the khan's pleasure should be known.

The whole assembly at the dur-khaneh now entered the inner court, which was greatly smaller than that without. The further end was occupied by a range of buildings, in the centre of which stood a handsome dewan-khaneh, or hall of audience, having in front a basin capable of being filled with water. Along one side of this basin were ranged a party of fifty well-appointed, and handsomely armed gholaums, or confidential guards, each defended by a shirt or plates of mail and helmet of embossed steel, or a turban twisted with chains of steel. Each wore a small round shield slung at his back, and at his side a scymetar besides his dagger. Some carried spears in their hands, and a few had heavy, uncouth matchlocks, a weapon by no means at that time come into general use.

On the other side of the basin stood a few of the khan's personal attendants, who gave way upon the approach of the assemblage from the

dur-khaneh, and took their places immediately in front of the hall. This was at first empty; but scarcely had the company arranged itself, when a door opened in an arched recess, and a person of gracious countenance and noble presence, dressed like others in the garb of preparation, over which was thrown a handsome scarlet barounee, entered the apartment, followed by a number of servants, and stepped forwards to occupy the chief seat at the upper end of the great window.

So soon as this personage appeared, he was saluted by a murmur of applause, and an obeisance from every one assembled in his sight. This he returned with graceful cordiality, and then calling on them by name, invited the whole to enter the hall and take their customary seats.

"Ascend, walk up, Meerza Ahmed—Bismillah! —be seated —Hah!—Allaverdee Khan—why stay you there?—Moolla Yusseef—Rajib Beg—your places are empty—be pleased to walk up—so—welcome—I bid ye all welcome—heartily welcome!"

On this, all who had any title to be seated in the presence, ascended the steps which led to the anti-chamber, and there leaving their slippers, entered the hall, and took their places according to their respective ranks and stations, in which ceremony they were assisted or controlled by the yessawul or chamberlain in waiting.

The military preparations of the day became now once more the subject of discourse, although their object was still unknown to most of the party. Some, aware that such secresy was frequently the choice or the policy of their chief, contented themselves with general expressions of anxiety and hopes for success. Others, less delicate and more curious, sought, by cunning ques-

tions and insidious suppositions, or random guesses, to worm out the secret from those in the secret, who, maintaining a true diplomatic caution, amused themselves with the eagerness of their uninformed friends. This desultory conversation was suspended by the meerza's advancing to the khan, and informing him that certain strangers desired an audience, and requesting to know his pleasure as to receiving them. A few preliminary questions were followed by orders for their immediate admission, and the men were accordingly introduced.

"Who and what are ye, sirs?" demanded the khan, after the customary salutations and ceremonies of entrance—"What is your business with me?"

"I beg to represent," replied he who seemed the chief, "that we come as friends — friends to Sirafrauz Khan; and that we are the bearers of intelligence which may profit him much to know."

"Good — please God, we are not unthankful.—If thou art indeed the bearer of good tidings, thou shalt not lack the *mujdeh*.—Say on."

"May thy favour increase!—the name of Sirafrauz Khan is great in the land for generosity and worth—yet still, we are strangers—we have risked much in thy service, let thy forbearance excuse us, and let the khan comply with the wishes of his servants before their lips are opened."

Wullah! — a strange fellow — he acknowledges my liberality, but doubts it, nevertheless, in the same breath — but we can smile and forgive thee — say on — name thy terms, friend."

"They are simple, khan. First, we have come to thy dwelling freely, and in thy service; pledge thyself, therefore, that, even should the matter or manner of my communication displease thee, myself and my companions shall have freedom to de-

part unmolested. Secondly, our conference must be in private: we discourse not on matters of moment in so large an assembly. For the rest, let thyself be the judge."

"Easy terms, truly, by the bones of my father!" said the khan, with a smile: "what is there thou canst say that should move the wrath of Sirafrauz Khan? Be content—thou and thy companions shall have full liberty to depart unmolested: for the rest, these, my friends, shall remove out of ear-shot—all but the meerza there: further privacy I grant not to strangers."

A momentary struggle might have been observed in the stranger's countenance; but, quickly recovering himself, he replied,

"It is well, khan—be it so: I am under your shadow—your honour is my protection. And now that we are alone, listen—in me you see the well-known Goorg Allee Beg, the true and faithful servant of him who was once thy friend, though now, through thine own fault, thine enemy, Zekee Khan Zimoorloo. Deeply has the khan felt and resented the slights and the affronts he has received from thee, Sirafrauz Khan—deeply did he swear to avenge them, and zealously did I, his servant, apply myself to aid his purpose. But 'friendship,' saith the proverb, 'is better than strife;' and the heart that forgiveth, according to our holy prophet, is doubly blessed. As the bow that has long been bent, when the string is relaxed resumes its natural shape, so has the heart of my master returned to its love for thee, khan, and yearns to renew the friendship which was of old. Intelligence, which much imports thy safety and thy honour, has, by a fortunate chance, come to his knowledge, and I, his servant, am honoured in being chosen as the bearer of this offering of peace. All that

ne seeks, in return, is a renewal of ancient friendship — the completion of that alliance which his father of blessed memory so much longed to behold, and which he himself desires above all earthly blessings. Thou art benevolent and prudent, khan — let the cloud that has been between thee pass away — let the pearl of the tribe of Beyaut shed its light in the harem of the chief of the Zimoorloo — and let the sun of thy favour brighten the countenance of thy slave in the eyes of his noble master."

"Ah! *yaftim* — I comprehend," responded the khan, with some contempt. "The worthy Goorg Allee Beg, whose name has assuredly reached us, but whose present appearance doubtless prevented his being recognised by our servants, will forgive any seeming disrespect towards a person of his consequence: and now let him, in turn, listen to the words of Sirafrauz Khan. Although he may desire that all clouds which intercept from him the favour and friendship of his neighbours should be removed, and that peace and amity should be re-established — and although he is ever ready to acknowledge an act of kindness, and to return threefold every benefit he receives — yet he is by no means prepared to purchase that friendship, or these benefits, at the price of his duty or his honour. Friend Goorg Allee Beg, thou hast lighted on the only subject which could have moved the displeasure of Sirafrauz Khan at such as thee — but his anger is lost in contempt. If the friendship of thy master is only to be purchased on such terms, we must ever remain foes; and if the gloom of his harem is only to be dispelled by the presence of her whom thou termest 'the pearl of our tribe,' it must remain for ever dark; — were thy boasted intelligence to involve the risk of property and life,

I would not purchase it at such a price. Thou hast thy answer, and thy leave — refresh thyself, and depart."

"Have a care, khan! thou canst not guess the value of my secret. Danger overhangs thee — calamity awaits thee — aye, in the point which will wound thee deepest: one word from me can turn it all away — wilt thou not purchase that word?"

"Never! Let danger come — I am prepared to meet it; but such threats I scorn, as I do their authors. Away! thou hast thy leave, I say."

"Once more, khan, pause — beware! — thy honour is in danger — the enemy is even within thy gates — one word of mine unmasks him — reflect, ere it be too late. Thy honour, khan, is at stake!"

"The enemy! By the head of the prophet, I think thou sayest true — nor is it difficult to discover him. Away! lest I forget myself — Bismillah! —"

"Fool-hardy chief! must I tell thee more? — I say, then — "

But, at that moment, a hurried step was heard, and a gholaum, rapidly approaching, ran up to the window where the khan was seated, and exclaimed,

"I beg to represent to your highness, that but a few minutes since, Allee Sheer Gholaum suddenly quitted his post and his horse, and has taken the *bust* (or sanctuary) of the stable!"

"The sanctuary of the stable? — Allee Sheer Gholaum? — art thou mad, fellow? — how? — what do you mean?" demanded the khan, in astonishment.

"What can I say, sir? — your slave has told the truth — your highness's gholaum, Allee Sheer, has taken sanctuary, and now stands at the head-stall of the khan's horse."

"But what has he done," demanded the khan—

why has he fled thither? — has he murdered any one?"

"We know nothing, my lord, it is but a few minutes since he was missed, and the *meerachor* * sent immediately to inform Mustapha Beg, in the service of your highness."

"Let Mustapha Beg come hither, and bring with him this foolish fellow — taken the *bust!* — strange news these!" As he spoke thus, his eye fell upon the strangers with whom he had been just conversing. "As for these men," said he, aside, to the Meerza, "let them freely depart according to my word — what is spoken, is spoken — nay, let them be entertained, and receive a *khelut* each, that the liberality of Sirafrauz Khan may remain unquestioned. Even should they be spies, what they have seen they have seen — there is no help for it — but let not the evil be increased — should they desire to remain here for a time, let it be under strict watch, nor let them wander at large around the place, nor converse with any one.—Say, sirs, do ye wish to depart — or seek ye to repose yourselves here longer — if so, you are welcome to such accommodations as this place can afford you."

"May the prosperity of the khan increase! our further stay is fruitless, and we desire only to depart: but let the words of thy servant be had in remembrance when the hour of evil arrives; he who despises an honest warning, let him not complain when the roof falls and crushes him."

Further speech was interrupted by the arrival of Mustapha Beg, the captain of the gholaums, who, approaching his master, said, "My lord, I beg to represent that Allee Sheer gholaum keeps his

* Literally, lord of the stables — master of the horse.

stand by the head of your highness's horse, *Kara-gooz*,* and refuses to quit the place, unless your highness in person shall repair thither, and give pledge for his safety; or that your son, the young Abbas Khoolee Khan, shall place in his hand a koraun, on which your highness shall have sworn to grant the *amaun*. It is well-known to your highness, that no one dare force him from the sanctuary, may it please you to order accordingly."

"Ah, my father!" exclaimed a beautiful and noble-looking youth, who had just entered the room, and was standing in a respectful posture, not far from the khan's person — "by your life I pray you let me go to Allee Sheer gholaum! what ill can he have done, so good, so kind, so brave as he is? — Oh let me carry the koraun as he desires, dear father — let me bring him hither, and may his face become white in your eyes!"

The grave countenance of the father relaxed into a momentary smile, as he took from one of the moollahs a copy of the sacred volume. Solemnly raising it to his head, he said, "By the oath of the Most High, and the name of his prophet Mahomed, I swear that whatever he hath done to me or mine, not a hair of his head shall be injured by my will or desire. — Let him repair hither in full confidence, and explain these strange proceedings — go, my son, carry him this, my sacred oath."

The surprise excited by the occurrence of these unexpected events, broke forth, at length, in a murmur, which pervaded the assembly. Each man spoke apart to his neighbour, in low but earnest tones, while the khan sat silent and abstracted. On a signal from the meerza, the three

* Black eyes.

strangers were conducted from the presence by the yessawul in waiting; and, in a little while afterwards, Abbas Koolee entered the court, followed by a young man, whose fine person and prepossessing countenance, in spite of his disordered habiliments, created an obviously favourable impression upon the beholders. His dress and appointments declared him to be a gholaum, and he was led forward, by two of his companions, in front of the window where the khan his master was seated.

"Come forward, unhappy — we have sent for thee," said the khan — "we desire to understand the meaning of these strange news — we would know what can possibly have impelled you, at such a moment, to desert your duty, and fly like a criminal whose life is forfeit, to sanctuary? — Open your eyes — hast thou known me for a blood-drinker — a tyrant — one who lightly trifles with the lives of his servants — that thou shouldst force from me an oath to refrain from that, of which I never thought even in a dream? — Why hast thou thus sought to blacken my face? or what dirt hast thou thyself been eating?"

He paused, and bent a keen but benevolent eye upon the young gholaum, who seemed to ponder awhile for a reply. At length, shaking off the grasp of the attendants, who at a signal from the khan stepped back a pace, he pressed both hands upon his face, as if to chase the flush of shame or indignation from his brow — for, when he removed them it was pale, and the expression of his eye was even calm and collected; and he thus addressed his judge —

"May the shadow of the khan increase — may his prosperity suffer no diminution! God forbid that his servant should lessen his name, by deeming him either capricious or cruel! Freely has my blood

been shed in your service, khan, and freely should my life be sacrificed in defence of your honour. May the dust that is raised fall upon my own head alone! Listen, now, to the words of your servant, and then judge of his conduct: — Prepare for wonders!" Then, drawing his fine figure to its full height, and resting his left-hand with dignity upon his girdle — ' In me," continued he, " behold Reza Koolee, son of the late Mouzuffer Khan, of Mianabad!"

The descent of a demon in a thunder-bolt would scarcely have produced a greater sensation in the assembly, than these few words. A momentary silence was succeeded by a tumultuous burst of confusion and rage. The name of the youth and of his father seemed to act like a spell of discord and violence. All rose as one man — every hand griped to scymetar or dagger, and every tongue burst forth into shouts of indignation and abuse. — "Seize him! slay him! cut him to pieces! Has the unblest wretch come here to defile our beards, and heap dust on our heads? — How came he? what devil brought him? where have our eyes been? Has he dealt with magic? Kill the vile dog!" And many rushed forward to execute the threatened vengeance, while others, though not less loud in their execrations, pleaded the rights of hospitality — the sacred privilege of the *bust* — and maintained, that however deserving of death, the honour of their chief and tribe was bound for the young man's safety — that whatever his conduct might have been, it could not invalidate the force of the khan's oath. Some went even further, and declared that the six months' meritorious services of the young gholaum, and the blood he had shed in the cause of the tribe, should be considered in deciding on his fate, and weigh much in mitigating his punishment.

During this tumultuous burst the khan uttered not a word. At the first moment of surprize he had partaken of the general astonishment; but controlling his emotions by a strenuous mental exertion, he instantly resumed his composure, and sat steadily regarding the youth, imperturbably silent in the increasing uproar. It was a strange but impressive scene: — the calm and dignified serenity of the chief, who alone of all retained his seat, and the lofty bearing and steady aspect of the young gholaum, as he stood with erect countenance, and an eye of blended modesty and firmness, regardless of the rage and confusion around him, and heedful only of the chief, whose word was fate, were powerfully contrasted with the furious looks, the angry voices and violent gestures of the rest of the assembly, both within and without the dewan-khaneh; — it was like two angels of light controlling with a glance the powers of darkness and evil.

At length the khan broke silence, and stretching forth his arm, requested his friends to reseat and compose themselves. "Trust," said he to Sirafrauz Khan for protecting his own honour, and determining on the mode of punishing insult or repelling aggression." But scarcely had order been restored in the assembly, when a bustle at the door which led to the *kehlwut*, or private apartments, attracted the notice of the chief as well as of the rest: an attendant hurrying forward, whispered, in the mysterious tones which are used in all that relates to the "forbidden place," that "the young *khanum* was suddenly taken ill, and that the *banou* requested the khan's immediate presence."

A cloud of uneasy feeling overspread the brow of the chief at this announcement; but instantly recovering himself, he replied, in the same constrained voice. "If the illness be serious, let

Meerza Hafiz Tahbeeb be summoned to attend,—the business without presses more than that within, and so tell the banou;" and having said thus, he turned once more towards the youth, who was the object of general attention. But no sooner had he begun to address him, than the clamour within was renewed; shrieks and cries from the underoon excited a general sensation among the auditory, which even the etiquette of eastern politeness could not altogether conceal, and a cracked female voice was heard talking with great emphasis at the private doorway, as if the owner were ready to bestow her presence upon the assembly. With an expression of extreme impatience the khan at length arose, and making an apologetic gesture to the company, who, as a matter of course, had risen simultaneously with him, he strode hurriedly to the door and disappeared, leaving his guests a prey to various conjectures; and eyeing each other with an expression of curiosity, which, for the moment, diverted their attention from the prisoner, who had so lately roused their wrath.

In the passage leading from the private doorway, the khan encountered an elderly female, who, with the freedom of an old and confidential servant, commenced a violent verbal attack upon her master. "Ahi, thou man without a soul! — thou merciless man! where art thou lingering, when that moon of beauty — that pearl of excellence — that daughter whom thou deservest not, lies dead or dying in thy underoon!"

"Punah be khoda! — dead! — dying!" exclaimed the khan, startled. "In the name of God, Atougha, art thou mad? It is not an hour since I left Leilah well!"

"Wullah! mad! — would to God I were; but come and see — see your child before she dies! —

and then call the old *nana** mad for speaking truth!"

Thunderstruck, and now thoroughly alarmed, the khan, hastening his steps, passed through the *khelwut*, which led by another short passage to the women's apartments, and went directly to those of his daughter. On lifting the door-curtain of quilted-silk which closed the entrance, a sight presented itself but ill calculated to allay the fears of a fond father. Upon the sort of couch or mattress which, spread upon the floor, serves in eastern countries as a bed, in one corner of the well-carpeted chamber, lay a young creature whose pale countenance and disordered dress threw over her an air of desolation confirmative of old Atougha's worst tidings. Stretched at her length in that utter prostration which belongs to death or insensibility alone, — her head supported by an elderly female who held some essence to her nostrils — her right hand thrown helplessly across her person, while the other was chafed by a slave girl; no wonder that the khan, when this scene met his eyes, believed that all was indeed over, and that the soul of his daughter had gone to taste the joys of Paradise!

"Khodah Boozoorg! what is this?" exclaimed he: "what dust has fallen on our heads? — how has this happened? — Oh God! my daughter, speak — speak to your dear father!"

The sound of her father's voice seemed to recal the fainting girl, in some degree, to consciousness. She half opened her large black eyes, but the shriek and shudder with which she instantly closed them, betokened any thing rather than

* Nana is a familiar expression used for *nurse*—governante — equivalent to the "*bonne*" of the French.

pleasure at his presence. "Thanks be to God! she lives at least," said the khan, greatly relieved. "Leilah, my dear child, speak to your father — say what ails thee?"

"Allah, Allah! thanks be to God!" exclaimed the old nurse, "she does live — she recovers — Ah, my life, my pearl — my darling child — look up — speak to thy old nana! — fear not, my soul — here is thy father ready to grant any thing thou canst desire!"

A heavy, shuddering sigh, broke from the oppressed girl as recollection dawned upon her mind, and life slowly returned to her limbs. Lifting one hand, she pressed it to her forehead, while, raising herself on the couch with the other, she gazed distractedly around. "Is it true, nurse? — is it all true, or only a fearful dream?" uttered she, in a low voice of anxiety and pain, as her eye caught the figure of her old attendant.

"What is it, my daughter? — what is it you fear?" said the khan, tenderly: but another shriek cut short his words, and she again clasped her hands on her closed eye-lids, as if to shut out some fearful spectacle.

"In the name of Allah, woman, what is the meaning of this?" exclaimed the khan, in tones of impatience and astonishment. "What demon has got possession of my child? — Nurse, and thou, Hedeyah, by your souls tell me what has happened?"

"I would humbly represent," said the elderly lady, who was in fact the banou, and wife of the khan — "I would represent that the truth has not yet reached the comprehension of your servant. Not many minutes ago, while I sat in my apartment, being alarmed by a scream from Leilah, and hearing the voice of Atougha in a louder key

than usual, I rose and went straight to her chamber. Some time elapsed before I obtained admission, and when I did, I found the poor girl in a dismal state, quite unable to tell what ailed her. It was then that we first sent for my lord: the messenger returned, and was stating, in reply, that you were busy directing the execution of some criminal, when Leilah uttered another shriek and fainted quite away. On this, away ran the nurse, leaving the poor girl to me and Noorbuxsh there; and thus have we remained until you made your appearance. — This is all I have to say."

"And *you*, old woman — know you nothing of this disorder or its cause?" sternly demanded the khan. "On your life I charge you declare the truth — speak!"

"La illah-ill-ullah! what news is this? What can I know, khan? — what but that the dear child has been unwell — out of spirits for these some weeks past? — young girls will be so; — and she hates these chappows, and fears for the life of her father! — by your head, khan, it is true — the very thought of blood makes her ill; and, as ill luck would have it, she heard that you were going to punish some one — to put him to death — and her heart melted within her: but all will be right now — you will forgive the poor fellow, khan, and please the dear child!"

"Woman," replied the khan, with increased sternness, "dare you tell me that this is all, when even now you declared to me that my daughter was dead or dying? — What filth have you been swallowing?"

"Allah! Allah! I eating dirt? Did you not see her this moment stretched out like a corse? Had I not cause to say as I did — eat dirt, truly!"

"Yes, I repeat it — thou canst not have told the full truth; and what silly stuff of blood and murder is this you have been throwing in our face? Even if there were a man to be punished, who is my daughter, a girl of a noble tribe, too, that she should faint at the sight or the very name of blood? I say, open your eyes; — beware! old woman, for the truth shall be discovered! But thou, my daughter, speak, and say what ails thee? — Why dost thou cover thy face so like a guilty thing? — Hast thou ever had cause to dread thy father, that thou canst not look upon him? — What is he to suppose?"

Yet still the taper hinna-stained fingers kept their place, concealing the large black orbs from which big tears forced their way, and trickled on a bosom so young and fair and lovely, as seen through the disordered dress, that it would have disarmed the malice of a fiend. Her head-dress, too, had fallen, and the glossy waving locks of deepest black, strayed over a skin which, though gently tinged with the rich cast of yellow so frequent with her country women, appeared like alabaster by the contrast. The father's heart was touched; armed and encumbered as he was, he knelt by the side of the lovely mourner, and besought her to compose herself and speak to him: but the tears only fell faster, and the sobs grew more convulsive at this expression of his kindness. "I cannot — I cannot — I dare not," she faultered at length — "it is past, and I am willing to die; but let me die in peace!"

"Die, my child! — why should you die? — what madness is this? Nurse — Atougha," added he, sternly, "it is thou that art to blame; — the cause of all this folly must be known to thee, and at thy hands shall I require it!"

"Oh no, no, no! — spare my dear nana, and I will tell you all!" exclaimed the weeping Leilah, interrupting the loud remonstrances of her nurse — "Father, I am ready to do all you require — but we must be alone — Allah, Allah! grant me strength to speak."

"Silly child, what fancy is this?—but thou shalt be indulged."

The banou and the slave-girl left the apartment at the khan's signal; but instead of becoming composed, the grief of Leilah burst forth with new violence. "Calm thyself, child," said her father, not without some impatience — "we are, now as thou wishedst, alone—tell me then what has moved thee thus?" — but the bitter sobs which almost choked her, still prevented her from articulating a word.

"Leilah, this is worse than folly; it looks like guilt. I can linger here no longer to await thy return to reason; but beware—beware I say—thy father loves thee, but he can also punish."

"Punish! O God! and am I not then fully punished. Listen to me, father — bear awhile with one who will not long claim thy pity — know, that in him whom thou hast put to death this day, thou hast slain the man who saved thy daughter's life and honour!"

"Thou ravest, child — who has been put to death? — and where is he that hath saved thy life or honour?"

"Not dead!" exclaimed the maiden, springing from her couch — "Oh Allah! can it be? — they told me he was killed — cut in pieces — not dead! —oh, then by your soul,—by your daughter's life, dear father, hurt him not — believe me that he is in truth your daughter's deliverer." And while she clung with trembling energy to the knees of

her father, close as the ivy embraces the oak, the dubious light of new awakened hope struggled in her beautiful countenance, with the despair which till then had reigned there."

"Leilah, said I not well that thou art beside thyself? for otherwise assuredly a daughter of mine could never talk or act as thou hast done. What ravest thou of the stranger that saved thy life? What madness, to confound him with the gholaum who has this day been brought before me. Mark me, child, thy father is no murderer; he is just, and knows what is due to himself and to others. Could I think but for a moment that thou hadst been weak enough to tarnish thy own honour and that of thy family, by any unworthy attachment, my love for thee, child, would prove no bar to justice. Reflect in time — be wise — let me not have to pray to Allah, that as the lesser evil, my daughter may have been insane rather than imprudent — thy father cannot doubt thy honour — let him find thee as hitherto—high-minded, modest, and obedient, as becomes a dutiful child, and the daughter of the chief of the Beyaut."

With these words the khan arose and quitted the apartment, leaving his daughter too much confounded and intimidated for immediate reply. He returned and resumed his seat in the durbar, with his mind far more perplexed and alarmed than when he left it, and the gloom of his brow was reflected from every countenance around. All sat wrapt in uneasy cogitations, nor did any one seem disposed to break the uncomfortable silence, until an aged person, who occupied a seat near the chief, and whose dark and rayless countenance declared the inhuman violence of which he had been the victim; while the ferocious expression of his countenance betrayed the evil passions that might have

provoked it, raised himself from his stooping attitude, and erecting his gaunt figure, spoke as follows —

" Sirafrauz Khan — thou art the son of my sister — these eyes, which are now sightless, have seen and loved thee as child, boy, and man. These arms, which are now powerless, taught thee to bend the bow and point the spear. From the days of thy boyhood we have fought these accursed Koords together — we have wasted their lands, plundered their villages, driven off their cattle, made their young men and maidens prisoners, and cut the throats of the old. Again, on our part, have we not sustained loss, and toil, and bonds at their hands? How many of our fathers are childless? — how many mothers weep their captive daughters? Canst thou thyself forget thy slaughtered father? — and as for me, are not these sightless eyelids tokens of their unquenchable hostility? — their blood is upon our hands, and ours reeks on theirs. When has any intercourse, except that of war and rapine, been between us? — what act of mercy or of kindness can either side reproach itself with having received from the other? — what do they feel for us but hatred, what do we seek for but revenge? In the name of God, then, Sirafrauz Khan, what claim to mercy or forbearance can be set forth on the part of this youth — this son of an accursed father, who, like the treacherous fox, has stolen into the lion's den? Why should he return to his fellows, after defiling our beards, to tell what he has seen and done? It cannot be — Bismillah! — the furoshes are at hand — deliver him to their will — let his dishonoured carcass become food for the vultures and jackalls, and let the tribe rejoice in thy justice!"

There was a murmur in the assembly as the old

man concluded; and various voices were heard, applauding or condemning his sentiments. "Well spoken — excellently well!" said one — "the old blood-drinker is game to the last!" — "Ahi! by the head of the khan, he is the true friend of the tribe," said another — "who is the ass that would let his enemy go, after once getting him down?" — "*Dur cen che shuck-ust* — what doubt of that," said another — "such an act were folly — what does Lokman say? — the footsteps all lead to the lion's den — when were they ever seen returning? — besides, the last blood shed was our own."

"That's a lie!" interrupted a gruff voice — "for after Baukher Allee was down, I speared the unsainted Koord who struck him — but that's all one — such a prize as a chief's son does not come every day — the young ghorumsaug must die, that's certain."

"And yet he is a brave lad too — a *Khoob Juan*," murmured another, in a tone of commiseration — "well did he fight that day at the Soorkh-tuppeh — and my boy Feridoon would surely have been wolves' meat, had Allee Sheer not cloven the head of that huge Toorkoman Beg." — "Aye," said another, "and since ever he came among us, who can say that his face has once been blackened before us? what injury has he done? — And then the khan's oath — think of that, friends — an oath — how is that to be got over?"

A while had been consumed in these discussions, when the murmur gave way, as another old man, the reish suffeed, or elder of some village, whose white beard flowed nearly to his girdle, and whose face exhibited more than one deeply-indented scar, assumed the attitude of speech, and lifted up his voice — "May the khan's prosperity

increase!—I would represent in thy service that the words of Zulfeccar Khan, the uncle of the presence, are undoubtedly true and just. The interests of the tribe demand the life of that youth—the hands of his father were reddened with our blood—our sons have fallen by his sword, and our daughters have been carried off from our houses—we all demand the price of blood at the hands of this youth, nor can any oath, however cunningly obtained, interfere with the course of justice. To thee, khan, we look for justice, as the ruler and worthy protector of thy tribe."

"Well hast thou spoken, Baba Beg, and truly hast thou said that the price of blood is blood," replied another old warrior—"and we are no merchants to sell that of an enemy by the miscal. But thy thoughts are bitter, and thy heart is full of gall: thy losses are well-known—three gallant sons in as many years—all Rustums—Pehlewans; and thy underoon plundered of its only flower!—but after all was it not destiny? what is written must be. What have thy wrongs to do with this youth? he came to us as a friend—he has fought for us like a hero. What shall I say, khan? he has been your servant, he has eaten your salt,—"

"Yes, and would betray us by way of paying the debt," interrupted a fierce voice. "By the head of the khan, his favour to us has been great! he steals amongst us like a thief in the dark, acts the spy upon our arrangements, under pretence of serving us, to deliver us over, doubtless, to the tender mercies of his worthy uncle, at the convenient season!—What! does the khan lack gholaums?—are youths of metal become so scarce in the tribe that we are to be beholden to a dog of a Koord to fill their ranks?"

"Peace, Kudder-Beg; — what words are these? Who raised their voice against the youths of the tribe?" said Mustapha Beg, the captain of the gholaums — "Art thou jealous of Koordish prowess, that thou seekest to deprive the young man of the praise that is his due? Be he who he will, I affirm that Allee Sheer Gholaum has conducted himself as a brave soldier and a faithful servant, while under the command of Mustapha Beg."

"Why doth Sirafrauz Khan thus keep silence, when his tribe demand justice at his hands?" again broke forth in the harsh voice of Zulfecar Khan — "If the voice of his own blood speak not with power in his heart, let him listen to that of the Most High, delivered by his prophet (on whom be the blessing of God!) Let Moollah Ahmed be called on to declare the law, and let decision be made accordingly."

The alertness with which the moollah rose from his seat, at the call of the old khan, betrayed the impatience he felt to deliver his opinion; but there was nothing of conciliation either in his manner or words. His countenance belied the pacific character of his garb, for it was inflamed with ill-suppressed fury, and the tone of his voice was that of smothered passion.

"If my lord desires," said he, "to learn the divine decrees in cases like the present, thy slave is ready to declare them. — Is it necessary to declare how it is written that 'blood shall have blood — an eye for an eye — and a tooth for a tooth?' and doth not the holy prophet say, 'Deliver mine enemies into my hands O God! Let their bones be broken, and their blood be poured out before me!' Lo, here is this youth delivered into our hands—the blood of our kinsmen cries aloud; and shall not our arm be raised to smite? — It may

be said, 'he hath taken the sanctuary'—but the sanctuary was made for the virtuous, the noble, and the unfortunate—not to protect treachery, nor to encourage the practice of deceit. He moreover hath by craft obtained an oath of security from the khan; but it is written that 'oaths with the wicked are as straw, or as the flax that is burned in the fire.'—It cannot and ought not to avail him;—thy slave has spoken—it is for the khan to decide."

"It is well, moollah," said the khan, arousing from the moody silence he had so long maintained, and who till then seemed rather occupied with his own thoughts, than attending to the bustle and conversation around him—"It is well—thou hast said, and we have heard thee—thy meaning has reached our apprehension. And now, Moollah Yussuff, bismillah! will you also favour us with your sentiments?"

"In your service, my lord," replied the moollah, whose appearance differed greatly from that of a reverend brother, for he possessed a tranquil and benevolent countenance, in which true piety appeared blended with charity and good will to all mankind. "The words of the learned moollah are doubtless correct: most certainly the Almighty has ordained, by the mouth of his prophet, (with whom be peace!) that the slayer of men shall perish by the hand of man; and it hath further been laid down, that the next of kin may exact such lawful vengeance from the murderer of his kinsman. But it is obvious that this permission is given rather as a restraint upon violence, than for the gratification of evil passions; for the prophet's exhortations to mercy are no less frequent than urgent, and to receive the price of blood, instead of shedding life, is not only permitted, but recom-

mended. Of the five things acceptable to God, are not these among the most prominent — to promote peace, when the season for vengeance is most tempting—and to forgive thine enemy freely, when you have him most in your power. If it were fit that thy servant should offer his humble advice, he would say, Behold the son of thy principal enemy. It is true, that on his hand may be blood of our friends; yet of his own accord he came amongst us, lived with us as a friend, fought for us, and was wounded in our service. At the approach of danger or discovery, he takes the sanctuary, which none dares violate, and leaves it only on the security of a sacred oath. His conduct calls for explanation — let such be required of him. But if it be desirable to staunch a feud, may not here be the means? — if we ever seek to stop the flow of blood, is not this the time? With so valuable an hostage in our hands, what terms may we not make. The khan is wise—he will weigh the words of his servant; what need is there of more?"

However amiable or praiseworthy the sentiments of the last speaker, they assuredly did not gain sympathy with the majority of his audience; for a murmur of disapprobation arose, and many a term of abuse and indignation, mingling with exhortations to immediate violence, declared the temper of the assembly. "Kill him! — Slay the miscreant! — Cut the *pider soochteh* in pieces! — Drink his blood! — Give the Koordish dog to the furoshes!" — and a thousand yet more offensive expressions, were echoed from mouth to mouth. During the whole of this long and trying period, the young man remained standing nearly in the same spot, his arms crossed upon his breast, his eyes directed steadily forward, or occasionally gazing around with a half contemptuous glance, as the clamour

grew outrageous. Only once or twice, his bosom heaved, a flush spread over his countenance, and he gave way to an impatient gesture. But at the tumult which succeeded the speech of Moollah Yussuff, it was obvious that his mind was roused to a full sense of the predicament in which he stood; and, probably supposing that the moment of death had arrived, he drew himself up with dignity, as if to meet it becomingly.

It was then that the young Abbas Koolee, the the khan's son, who had long been an earnest auditor, but whose good breeding did not permit him to interrupt his seniors, rushed forward, and threw himself at his father's feet.—"My lord, my father!" said he, "let your son intreat you, spare Allee Sheer Gholaum — protect him from these men! —he is true, and good, and brave — he loves you, father — he has sworn it a thousand times — he would give his life for you— never, never did he injure one of us. And well does he love your son, father—it is Allee Sheer that taught me to use the spear so well—and you know how you praised me at exercise the other day — there is not one of the gholaums that rides so gracefully and boldly, and none of them have so kind a heart!—Oh, by your own soul, my father, and by the life of your son, let not Allee Sheer be harmed — let not his blood be on our heads—you know it was I who took him from the *Bust*, with the holy koraun and your sacred oath! Oh, never let him feel that the boy he loved and delighted in has been made the means of betraying him to death!"

The softening influence of affection beamed forth in the face of the father as he gazed on the animated countenance of his son, and his increasing energy in the cause of generosity and friendship: but he constrained his feelings, resuming the stern

serenity which had hitherto characterized his demeanor. "Rise, rise, my son," said he, "this is not needed; rest satisfied of thy father's resolution to do justice." Then turning towards the gholaum, he addressed him in grave and impressive tones. "Young man, you have avowed yourself an enemy, the son of him who was our deadly foe—the natural chief of a hostile race; yet here art thou found in the midst of us, mingling in our councils, engaging in our enterprizes — established in the very bosom of my own family, and holding a distinguished place amongst its guards. Is it wonderful that, now thou art discovered, we should look upon thee as a snake amid the flowers—a tiger couching in the reeds — a muffled dagger, ready on fitting opportunity to wound the hand that holds thee. Who is there that can reasonably doubt thou art a spy? — and what hast thou to urge why the doom of a traitor should not be awarded against thee?"

A flush of strong emotion had suffused the young man's face when he saw the son of his late master come forward to plead so energetically for his life, and his arms were instinctively extended towards him; but speedily recovering self-possession, he listened to the khan's appeal with a respectful but unquailing aspect. "May the prosperity of the khan increase!" said he at length — "his servant has little to reply—the khan is aware of all the circumstances, and must decide. Traitor, or unfaithful to my salt, I am not, nor ever have been — for this I might appeal to all that know me—the khan, and my commanders can tell, whether since I entered his service, my conduct has been dutiful, faithful, and zealous, or the contrary. The cause of entering it at all alone remains to tell — this I am ready to do at his command, and in the presence of such as he may see fit to con-

fide in — may God grant the explanation be to his satisfaction, inchallah! — if otherwise, I am here, and notwithstanding his oath, let me be dealt with according to his will — the rest is in the hands of Allah!"

There is a charm in open, manly bearing, which is irresistible to every well-disposed mind; it is felt, though it may not be acknowledged, by the coward and the villain, as well as by the noble-minded and the brave; and there are few situations in which it fails of producing a sensation favourable to those who display it. Notwithstanding the bitter feelings and rooted prejudices which swayed the majority of his auditors, the murmur which rose from the assembly as the young man concluded, was obviously of a an auspicious nature, and the eye of the khan shone with a brighter and a more cheerful beam, as he once more addressed him.

"It is well, young man — to the truth of the first part of thy statement, I myself am witness — may God grant that the rest be equally satisfactory, for, inchallah! we seek not thy death. All these are our friends, and what touches the honour or the welfare of the tribe, it is their right to hear."

"I would represent further," replied the youth, "that part of what I have to say concerns the khan alone."

A dark glow overspread the face of the chief when he heard these words, for he remembered what had just passed in his own underoon, and dreaded the young man's disclosures. "If such be the case," said he, "so much publicity may be inconvenient — we shall select our auditory. Friends," said he, turning to the assembly, "this audience must be private for a while: trust to

your chief for the protection of your honour and your interest as well as of his own. Meerza, we shall require your aid, and yours, Mustapha Beg; and do you, Moollah Yussuff, assist us with your judgment; and now young man, bismillah! — speak on — inform us, we wait your words."

The gholaum, or, as he must now be called, Reza Koolee khan, accordingly commenced his explanation; but, as it is necessary to the comprehension of our tale, that the reader should know more of the circumstances and localities connected with it than could be gathered from the young man's story, we shall once more take the narrative into our own hands.

CHAPTER II.

THE ADVENTURE.

The vast province of Khorasan, divided as it is naturally by desert plains or ridges of arid mountains into a variety of districts, has at all times been occupied by a race of petty chieftains, who exercised a patriarchal, and often despotic sway over the tribes or septs, of which they were the heads. These, turbulent and overbearing as they were, when the sovereign happened to be powerful and warlike, formed, with their dependants, the strength of his armies; but, when the sceptre was weakly swayed or precariously held, they were, like our own feudal barons of old, the terror of the throne and the curse of their country. Bold and ambitious, acknowledging no law but their own will, controlled only by that tacit compact which united their interests with that of their clans or followers, each of these chieftains conceived himself a fit aspirant for empire, and the history of Persia bears frequent witness to the success of their efforts. Others less fortunate established themselves in strong holds, forming states of more or less independence and power, and their

struggles to increase their influence and extend their dominions, depopulated and desolated the land, and gave rise to innumerable blood-feuds. The soldiers of fortune, and petty leaders who sprung from this condition of things, gathering companions, formed bands of robbers, who plundered caravans and travellers, sometimes even villages, and, rising in this predatory scale, perhaps became chiefs or princes in their turn.

The strife and anarchy which invariably keep pace with the decay of an eastern dynasty, have at all times exhibited themselves earlier and more violently in Khorasan, where the power of the crown is generally weaker, than in the other provinces of Persia; and to such a period does our tale relate. The power of the Seffees had passed away, their glories were dimmed or shone with false and dying lustre. The country was ripe for revolution; the highways swarmed with robbers, and the mountains with predatory bands headed by chiefs, who cared little for the ruin they might cause, so that plunder in plenty was obtained.

No part of Persia had suffered more severely under this disastrous system than that portion of Khorasan which is the scene of our narrative. Exposed, like the whole tract between Semnaun and Herât, to the predatory incursions of the Toorkoomans, the policy of the great Abbas had, with a view to check such encroachments, transplanted several thousand families of Koordish tribes from the province of Armenia, to the district bordering on the northern desert. There they not only flourished, but, while that monarch lived, they effected the intended purpose. But, as the power of his successors became lessened, the loyalty and efficiency of these tribes also diminished: they wasted the strength and means which ought to have

been directed against the common enemy, in quarrels and attempts to aggrandize themselves at one another's expense; so that, instead of protectors, the country found in them only an additional source of disorder to those under which it already groaned. Each chief, occupying some strongly fortified place, maintained the greatest number of retainers he could support. With these he made incursions on his neighbours, and repelled the aggressions which were directed against him in return. In these incursions, or *chappows*, as they were called, every village at a distance from the principal strongholds was plundered, or deserted for fear of being so; the land was abandoned, and, except where efficient protection could be afforded, cultivation and population almost totally disappeared.

Among the noblest clans of the district immediately south of Koordistan, (as the country inhabited by these Koords was named), was the Turkish tribe of Beyaut, which, for a hundred years, had maintained themselves in the vicinity of Nishapour. Of these, though at this time much scattered by misfortune, Sirafrauz Khan was hereditary chief; reduced in circumstances, he had been forced, like others, to temporize, until the changing time afforded him an opportunity for establishing himself in the strong hold of Kallah Feerozeh, where, by boldness and conduct, and by a generous and noble liberality of disposition, he succeeded, not only in attracting to his service a numerous and devoted band of retainers, chiefly the remnant of his own clan, but in creating around him a smiling country and a happy people. His chappows were frequent and successful, for the Beyaut chief was a child of the times: indebted for his existence to predatory warfare, and the assistance of predatory bands, he persevered in

the system by which he had thriven, and his horsemen were to be found as our friend Ruhmut Khan observed, "from Koom to Mushed, from Rhê to Toorsheez." Unable to recover full possession of the property of his ancestors, he satisfied himself with plundering those who had usurped them, and their cattle and property were often carried off, from the very gates of Nishapour.

All this had not, however, been effected without creating many enemies, and Sirafrauz Khan had quarrels enough upon his hands. Among the most deadly of these feuds was that with the chief of Mianabad, a branch of the Koordish tribe of Zafferanloo, which had been maintained on either side by a succession of bitter injuries and murders.

It was, in a skirmish with that family, aided by a strong body of Toorkomans, that Abbas Koolee Khan, the father of Sirafrauz, lost his life; and although "the dead Douglass won the day," — for the brother of the Koordish chief was slain in the action, so that the honor and advantage of the battle rested entirely with the Beyauts,—still the hereditary hatred was exasperated by the fortune of war, and the death of Abbas Koolee Khan was added to the list of grievances to be avenged on the Koords.

The bitterness of animosity was still further aggravated by the fatal event of another conflict, which took place during the struggles of Sirafrauz Khan, for power, or rather for existence. For although the Koordish chief was killed early in the fray, the Beyauts were driven with severe loss from the field; and Zulfecar Khan, the maternal uncle of their chief, being with several others of consideration taken prisoner, in the fierce hour of exultation and of victory, when evil passions were exasperated by mutual losses and unseasonable

reproaches, was inhumanly deprived of his eyes. Such an outrage was of itself sufficient to extinguish all hope of accommodation; but the Beyauts, whose chief had been severely wounded, and who had suffered much in the action, were unable, at the time, to make any attempt at retaliation; and, for some years previous to the commencement of our tale, the feud had languished; so that although the feelings of mutual hatred remained intrinsically the same, they certainly had diminished greatly in vivacity.

On the death of the Koordish chief, Mouzuffer Khan, his brother Nujjuff Allee Khan, a selfish and ambitious man, who had acquired great influence over the mind of the late khan, and had secured a strong party among the elders of the tribe, assumed the authority, and commenced exercising the functions of a chief, alleging, as the cause of this temporary usurpation, the exigency of the time, and the inexperience of the young Reza Koolee, son and heir of the deceased. Once firm in his seat, however, and in possession of the family resources, Nujjuff Allee Khan threw off the mask, and no longer concealed his determination to retain the power, he had thus guilefully acquired.

The only remaining family of the late chief, at the time of his death, were two sons and a daughter. Of the former, the eldest was Reza Koolee: the youngest was a mere child, but already gave high promise of personal and mental excellence. The daughter was a beautiful and high-spirited girl, a few years younger than her elder brother. The youngest boy had been the idol of its parents, and the darling of the whole family. Reza Koolee loved it as a sweet and interesting plaything; but on his sister he doated with the tranquil but de-

lightful fondness of fraternal affection — for the mingled dignity and sweetness which characterized the young Guleyaz, found a sympathetic feeling in his own breast. She had been the playmate and confidante of his youth; and, in the stormy season of manhood, the hours which he stole from sterner pursuits, to devote to the society of his beloved sister, were like the green spots in the desert — the resting-place to which his wearied soul would return, like the dove, in the day of danger and distress.

Yet, though gentle and affectionate where she loved, the character of Guleyaz was utterly void of weakness or timidity. Firm and courageous, she could act as well as feel; and, regardless of self, there was no sacrifice she would not make, no danger she would not dare, for those whom she regarded with feelings of affection or duty. Ardent and enthusiastic, her love was devotion — her perseverance in the path of duty unswerving and insuperable. Tender and fascinating, in the season of retirement and ease, there needed but the hour of trial, to prove her possessed of every quality that belongs to the high-minded and undaunted heroine. As yet, the whole energy of these warm affections was centred in her brother. Brought up together from childhood, their attachment was cemented by the feeling of mutual dependence, and the influence of early misfortune. He was her pride — her idol — the one bright star of her soul — the subject of her nightly dreams — the object of her waking hopes, and of her most ardent prayers.

On the death of his brother, Nujjuff Allee Khan, according to custom, took the family of the deceased into his own dwelling. The widow, unsupported by any strength of character, soon sunk

into a state of living nonentity, and was forgotten, until death released her from a wretched existence. Nor was the young Reza Koolee long of discovering the mortifying change of which he had become the victim. No longer regarded as the future chief, he found himself not only the object of neglect, but of suspicion and dislike; and the misery which he endured for a while was extreme. But Reza Koolee was not wholly friendless. Many of the connections and retainers of his father, and a still greater number of the tribe who had been attached to the late khan, though not possessed of influence sufficient to oppose the ruling party, nor of power enough to support the lawful heir with effect, were yet dissatisfied with the usurpation of the uncle, and formed a faction secretly disposed to aid the nephew.

Among the most zealous of these secret adherents was Meerza Seleem, son of the late khan's vizier, and, from childhood, the friend of Reza Koolee, a young man of high integrity and energy, united with uncommon prudence and sagacity. Meerza Seleem, who had watched the conduct of the self-elected chief, was aware of the dangerous predicament in which the son of his late master was placed, and strenuously counselled him to control his feelings, to accommodate himself to circumstances, to beware of awaking the jealousy of his uncle, or of affording him any handle for open accusation or hostility.

Convinced by many pregnant proofs of the soundness of this advice, the young Reza Koolee, notwithstanding a sufficient share of natural pride and impetuosity, compelled himself to act the prudent part. He even contrived to feign a degree of obtuseness and stolidity very foreign to his character, and succeeded, as it seemed, so well in

throwing his uncle off his guard, that the vigilance of which he had at first been the object, became relaxed, and his conduct less noticed. In truth, the khan began to find it necessary, for the consolidation of his power, to conciliate, as much as possible, the heads of families, and *teers* or septs of the tribe; and he knew that any overt act against the family of the late chief would not only be unpopular, but dangerously revolting. Of this feeling he had already received a disagreeable but convincing proof.

The young and promising boy, whom we have mentioned as the late khan's third surviving child, was suddenly taken ill, and died in great agony, after a few hours' indisposition. The mother, frantic with grief, declared her conviction that he had been poisoned — that he was the victim of his uncle's unprincipled ambition. Whatever truth might be in the accusation, alarm was immediately taken; and in the gloomy faces of the relatives and heads of families assembled in the next *salaam*, in the dewan-khaneh, Nujjuff Allee read the danger he should incur from even a suspicion of violence towards his brother's family. To have seen them one and all swept from the face of the earth would, doubtless, have been highly satisfactory, nor was there wanting many who believed the unhappy boy to have been but the subject of the first experiment upon the apathy or tolerance of the tribe; but he saw, from the temper of both friends and foes, that the time, at least for such decisive measures was not yet come.

The chief of a tribe, it must be remembered, especially if he has set the royal authority at defiance, and aims at independence, stands in a very different position from that of an absolute monarch, or royal governor, or even of a chief who still pro-

fesses allegiance to the king. The power of such a chief depends solely upon his hold over the love and devotion of his tribe — on the influence exercised over the community by his numerous relatives and connections, as well as by the members of his own family and on the number and fidelity of his immediate dependents.

Thus it becomes the constant study of such chiefs, whether heads of tribes, or self-constituted rulers of districts, to increase their strength and influence, by extending their connections, by conciliating their relatives and dependents, and securing the loyalty of the tribe in general, by a steady and just but liberal line of policy. A contrary course of conduct would be fatal, and the chief who, possessing even the important advantage of undisputed hereditary right, should yet, thoughtlessly or perversely, outrage the feelings of his tribe, or alienate the affections and forfeit the respect of his relatives, and the heads of septs and families, would soon, in all probability, lose both his station and his life.

Considerations of prudence and expediency will therefore afford a sufficient explanation of Nujjuff Allee Khan's forbearance, without giving him much credit either for humanity or good principles; yet Reza Koolee, as he bent over the blotched and distorted corse of his darling brother, and gazed upon the livid cheeks and blackened lips, read, in the painful spectacle, a lesson of caution for himself; and, as he stooped to kiss the pale and still beautiful brow of the murdered child, he swore that sooner or later, he would exact a heavy vengeance from the assassin. In silence and in sorrow did the brother and sister meet beside the body of their favourite, and, embracing each other with boding hearts, they vowed a vow of mutual

love and faithfulness, and pledged themselves to watch over each other's safety, and to lose no opportunity that heaven might afford them of visiting the murderous usurper with condign punishment.

From that time forward, Reza Koolee, with a steadiness of purpose which won the admiration and confidence of all his secret friends, pursued the line of conduct pointed out by prudence and necessity. Assuming a carelessness for all pursuits except those of an active and warlike description; affecting an indifference to all matters connected with government; disguising his real acuteness of intellect under an assumed bluntness of manner and dullness of apprehension, he courted employment on distant expeditions, and avoided as much as possible appearing in his uncle's presence. That a practised intriguer like Nujjuff Allee Khan could be completely blinded by such expedients, is scarcely to be imagined: it is rather probable that he encouraged warlike pursuits and desperate enterprises, in the hope that some lucky chance might rid him of his living fear, or that time and opportunity might at length seduce his nephew into open and tangible rebellion. But the stake which the young man played for was too important to be thrown away by carelessness or folly. Resolved not to strike a blow until success should be certain, Reza Koolee cautiously abstained from aught and every thing that might implicate his name, and justly or unjustly draw down the displeasure of his uncle.

Bold and enterprising by nature, endowed with firmness and judgment beyond his years, and gifted with a rare generosity and nobleness of mind, fain would the young man have devoted his whole capacities to the performance of his hereditary and legitimate duties, to promoting the prosperity of

his tribe, and extending the power and influence of his house; but checked in all his better impulses, the very energy of his character forced him into less laudable pursuits. The genius of the country and the period was warlike, but the object of every military enterprize was plunder, and Reza Koolee found no difficulty in obtaining permission to accompany the predatory expeditions sent out by his uncle. The skill and intrepidity which he displayed on such occasions soon raised him from the rank of a mere volunteer to that of command; and so great was the name which he acquired for conduct and success among his companions, that he found means gradually to collect and attach to his person a choice band of adventurers, who were disposed to fly at bolder game than common, and with whom, though still professedly in his uncle's service, he undertook daring expeditions, ravaged the lands of inimical states, retreating with a rapidity that mocked pursuit, plundered caravans, by whomsoever protected, or escorted such as consented to pay for the privilege of passing unmolested. He became, in short, a predatory chief—the leader of a band of daring marauders, the first step in the history of all successful adventurers of his country.

It was in the course of one of these expeditions that an adventure befel the young chief of Mianabad, which materially influenced his future fortune, and was the ultimate means of placing him in the dangerous predicament, in which he has been presented to our readers: but, in order to explain this, we must make them acquainted with another petty chief of the knot, who exercised independent authority in the district we have described.

Kelb Allee Khan, of Semulghan, was a man of fierce and overbearing temper, tenacious, and arro-

gant — ready to take offence, and not scrupulous at giving it; a person, in short, with whom as a close neighbour, it would have been impossible to maintain a friendly intercourse. Yet, while Sirafrauz Khan was still struggling for independence, considerations of policy had induced him to enter into terms of alliance with this chief, who held the keys of some of the easiest passes to the Attock, and could summon to his aid clouds of the Toorkoman robbers, who swarmed upon its borders. Armed with so dangerous a power, Kelb Allee could be as useful a friend, as he might prove a formidable foe; while the space which intervened between their respective territories diminished the chance of a quarrel.

In fact, a very tolerable understanding was, for a considerable time, maintained between the chiefs; nor was the cause which at length produced a rupture, of a nature to have been easily foreseen. Sirafrauz Khan, as the reader has already discovered, had a daughter, who, as she advanced from infancy to girlhood, gave such promise of future beauty, that her charms were soon celebrated over the country, and became the theme of many a flowing ode and song, from the pen of the rude poets of the neighbouring districts. The fame of her beauty, and the rising fortunes of her father, rendered her alliance so desirable in the eyes of the surrounding chiefs and nobles, that overtures from all quarters poured in. Among the rest, Kelb Allee Khan expressed his wish to enter into negociations for his son Zekee Khan, who was, he assured the Beyaut chief, a perfect model of worth and excellence; and so satisfied was the ruler of Semulghan of his own importance, and the value of his friendship to Sirafrauz Khan, that his missive was couched in terms, which seemed to admit no doubt of success.

Sirafrauz Khan loved his daughter: she had no sisters to share in her father's affection. Her brother, the young Abbas Koolee, was his only other child; there was, therefore, no room for those jealousies or cabals which so generally destroy the peace of families in the east, nor did the father feel anxious to part with one who to him was, in truth, the "Light of the Harem." On the other hand, the Beyaut chief neither loved nor respected the family who came forward with so much confidence to demand his daughter's hand. He had often been disgusted with the insolence and arrogance of its chief, and alarmed by the detection of several instances of slippery faith and dishonourable intrigue; in short, he looked upon Kelb Allee as a dangerous person, with whom the less he had to do the better.

In fact, the politics of Koordistan had, within the preceding few years, undergone a material change; and Sirafrauz Khan, though frank and honourable by nature, was, by education and habit, a Persian. He had tolerated the vices of Kelb Allee while he required the aid of that chief, but he was now firm in his seat. Other powers had arisen to counterbalance the influence of his former ally; and the connection, being now no longer either useful or agreeable, he was far more inclined to break it off altogether when he could decently do so, than to perpetuate and cement it by a matrimonial alliance. The answer returned was as civil and complimentary as the talents of his meerzas could frame it; but although adorned and mystified with all the elaborate circumlocution of Persian politeness, it was still a refusal; and, from the moment he received it, Kelb Allee and all his family became the determined enemies of the Beyaut chief;—he only regretted that the

power of the insulter was now so well established as to leave little hope of attacking it with effect.

Frequently and actively, though with cautious secresy, was the influence of Kelb Allee made use of to stir up the desert plunderers to harass the ryots and plunder the villages of Sirafrauz Khan; and the only thing which prevented his forming a league offensive with the chief of Mianabad, for the purpose of overthrowing the Beyaut power, was the existing state of politics which held them at variance, and some small matter of blood that was between them. In the course of time Kelb Allee died, and was succeeded by his son, Zekee Khan, a young man who, to the overbearing temper of his father, added many of the more disgraceful vices of his country. Naturally turbulent and unamiable, his evil propensities were encouraged and ministered to by one who had been his companion from an early period. This was no other than the personage who has been already introduced to the reader under the name of Goorg Allee Beg.

Born in the family of the khan, the son of a Toorkoman mother, he had been brought up about the person of his young master; and, considerably older than him, had been, to a certain extent, regarded as his instructor, particularly in all martial exercises, in which he excelled. Keen and acute in mind as he was uncomely in person, he contrived to conciliate the good opinion of those who, looking merely at his outward man, would have been disgusted: and so perfectly had he insinuated himself into the confidence and good graces, both of the late khan and of his successor, that at the death of the former, Goorg Allee was considered, if not in form and rank, yet certainly in influence, as the most powerful servant in the

khan's household. A more dangerous adviser the young chief could not have had; for his zeal was affected, his views of aggrandizement wholly selfish. He promoted his master's interests because it was the best way of becoming influential himself; but could he have secured his own succession to his master's power, by any act, however atrocious, that master would not, by his good will, have enjoyed either life or power for a single day.

Such were the auspices under which Zekee Khan succeeded to his father's rank and station. Urged by the same adviser, and stimulated by his own licentious passions, he attempted to renew the matrimonial negociation with Sirafrauz Khan, which had terminated so much to his father's mortification. But the notorious character of the suitor was little calculated to forward an unwelcome suit. A courteous but decided negative was once more returned, and the young chief of Semulghan, in bitter disappointment, swore that not only would he be deeply and terribly avenged upon the father, for the insult he had received, but that the daughter should, before three years elapsed, enter his harem — not as his wife, but as his *slave*. To compass this vengeance, Goorg Allee pledged himself; and though special care was taken to avoid alarming their purposed victim by premature threats, they sedulously employed themselves in devising means for effecting their nefarious project. So rancorous was the hatred of the khan, and so great the zeal of his minister, that considerations, usually the most urgent, were overlooked or disregarded in this service. As a means of increasing his own power to avenge a late affront, he made no difficulty of sacrificing an old enmity; and a short while beheld a union of the khans of Mianabad

and Semulghan, against their common enemy the Beyauts.

On the evening of a very long and toilsome march, which had led the young chief of Mianabad, with thirty chosen comrades, into a desert plain between Subzawar and Nishapour, in the track of caravans from Mushed to the westward, their scouts who kept the heights came galloping in, making signals to prepare for action; and on turning the shoulder of a hill, which jutted out into the plain, the cause became apparent. A caravan had been stopped, and attacked by a marauding party, obviously Toorkomans; but their number was not great, and Reza Koolee came instantly to the resolution of snatching the prey from their grasp.

Calculating much upon the intentness with which they were engaged in plundering, he led his men among the earthy hillocks, which in that quarter generally skirt the base of the hills; and so well did fortune and the form of the ground favour his manœuvre, that he reached unobserved a point, scarce a quarter of a mile from the scene of plunder. From thence, one rapid charge precipitated the whole party upon the busy and encumbered robbers. Many were cut down or speared before they dreamed of danger; and even when the alarm was given, their resistance was too feeble to be effectual. The remaining Toorkomans fled, accompanied by certain armed horsemen whose garb betrayed them to be of another class and nation. Pursuit, however, was not the object: care was taken by placing proper centinels, to prevent such a surprise as had succeeded with themselves. The rest of the party applied themselves with infinite zeal and dispatch, to collect and examine the booty.

The number of old men and of females, who

were unceremoniously tumbled out of the kajawahs, rendered it speedily apparent that their prize was a kafilah of pilgrims from Mushed, and this fact made a corresponding alteration in the arrangement of the captors; for, independent of the comparative poverty of such a booty, the religious prejudices of the country protected it from all violence on the part of the immediately neighbouring powers. Such a plea might indeed have been insufficient to secure the safety of a richer prize; but, under the circumstances, the Mianabad horsemen, as soon as they discovered the truth, not only desisted from violence, but began to assist the sufferers in recovering their beasts and their property. It is true that no scruples of conscience appeared to deter them from accepting such articles, as the gratitude of the rescued forced upon them: perhaps, too, a quick ear might have detected some hints of an intelligible nature, purporting that such attentions would not be ill taken: then, the animals and property of the unfortunate persons, who had fallen under the Toorkoman spears — who could prefer so clear a right to these, as the brave men who had recovered them from the plunderers' hands? Then, the adjustment of various disputes, concerning the goods that lay tumbled about, and a variety of similar arrangements, called into play the energies of all parties, and occasioned no trifling change of property.

During the whole of the tumult, the chief, less intent on the acquisition of a worthless booty than on preserving order and guarding against danger, rode about to every part of the field to enforce it. Before the Toorkomans had well retired, his attention was attracted to a group somewhat distant from the rest, among whom were several females in attitudes of extreme distress. On approaching,

he found it to consist principally of women, surrounding a prostrate camel: near them lay several dead or dying men, and from one of the kajawahs of the fallen animal, two men were endeavouring to drag a veiled female, who resisted them with violent shrieks. A single glance convinced Reza Koolee that the men were neither of the Toorkoman party nor his own, and as instantly did a blow from his sword lay one of them prostrate on the ground. The other, observing the fate of his comrade, fled with the utmost rapidity to a horse that stood near, sprung upon his back, and, striking him with the stirrups, was out of sight in a few seconds, while the attention of the young man was otherwise employed.

The rude grasp of her assailants had displaced the veil of the female, so that when he stepped forward to assist her in rising, it fell entirely off, discovering to his delighted eyes the person of a young girl, whose uncommon beauty was not diminished by the confusion and distress of her situation. Starting back a-pace, and assuming an attitude of profound respect, he addressed her in a voice which he well knew how to render soft and persuasive—"Fear nothing, lady; look on me as a protector—as a brother: be assured that no one shall molest you. I am your slave—command me!"

The women, observing this cessation of violence, eagerly claimed protection; and, nestling close around the young man, hung upon him, uttering a thousand blessings on him as their deliverer. But all was unheeded by Reza Koolee, save the fair and lovely yet fragile form that still stood trembling before him, shrinking from his ardent though respectful gaze, yet stealing a timid glance from under her darkly-fringed and downcast lids at the

noble person and speaking countenance of her champion. At length, an old woman, extricating herself from the gathering crowd, advanced, and, picking up the fallen veil, prepared to re-adjust it to the person of the young maiden, saying, "May thy house be prosperous, inchallah! my lord, whoever thou art: this is a fortunate hour, and my lord himself will not repent of having saved the daughter and the banou of Sirafrauz Khan Beyaut."

"Of Sirafrauz Khan!" exclaimed the young man — "wonderful! Ah! stay one moment — shut me not out from heaven so soon!" added he, earnestly, as the envious veil was descending over the features now indelibly engraved on his heart — "refuse me not one further glimpse of bliss!"

"Forgive me, sir," replied the old woman — "you cannot but know well what is due to the harem — to the honour of a female —" yet her hands, contradicting her words, lingered in their duty; nor did the speaking blush, nor the glance of the soft black eye, tell aught of displeasure at the liberty, as the form and features of the shrinking beauty disappeared beneath the blank *chudder*.

"Ah! that such a moon should ever be obscured by a cloud!" said the young man, drawing a long sigh, as he gazed upon her shrouded form — "the light of my eyes is gone! and my heart is melted into water!"

"Ahi! what words are these of my lord's?" said the old woman aloud; then in an under-tone she added, "Only guard well the harem of Sirafrauz Khan, and return it home to him in safety, and who can tell how soon the moon may re-appear."

"Be chusm!" replied the youth, "Hussein and Mustapha! hither! — guard these kajawahs

with your lives till my return — you shall lose nothing by it." With these words he left the spot to take measures for getting the caravan once more into motion.

On casting a rapid glance over the ground, Reza Koolee saw, that out of the fifty or sixty camels, of which the kafilah had originally consisted, several had been disabled in the shock, and that more than one of their conductors had fallen under the spears of the marauders. Not far from the spot where he had found the kajawah and its interesting contents, there were the marks of a sharp skirmish and stout resistance; for five or six men, whose garb and accoutrements declared their military character, lay dead, or still writhing in the agony of their wounds. More than a dozen Toorkomans were strewed among the scattered fragments of the caravan, each in the attitude or act of pillage, in which the hand of the avenger had overtaken him. But the spear and the scimetar had done their work well; and few of these exhibited a symptom of life. Here and there an unlucky pilgrim, in attempting to escape, had been arrested by the weapon of his pursuer, while those who remained quietly to be stripped and plundered, had fared better; for they still lived to abide the decision of their deliverers regarding their respective values.

Issuing a few rapid orders to catch the stray horses of the dead, and re-adjust the scattered loads, Reza Koolee returned to the spot where his soul was now centered. The shrowded and still trembling figure of the maiden was seated on a heap of clothes taken from a fallen camel, and the old woman was still ministering to her comforts, while ever and anon her voice was heard in lamentation, interrupted by sobs, in which chorus she was joined by all the other women.

"Ai Junâb!—Ai Nazir! Ai Aga!—ai wahi! unlucky day! — what dust has fallen on our heads? — who shall tell the khan of this misfortune! — but praise be to Allah! Our dear child — our khanaum is safe—and may his blessing be sure that saved her — Heif, heif! — alas! for the good Aga Junâb — alas for the brave gholaums! —their faces are white this day — but their reward is in paradise alone; for never, never will they see him who should have bestowed it on earth!—the wolves and the jackalls of this unblest sahrah will devour them. Ai wahi, ai wahi!" and the women around set up a wild cry, and all sobbed and screamed in concert.

Reza Koolee did his best to console them, and was whispering a few words of comfort and devotion to the veiled and silent figure, when his attention was attracted by a groan from one of the wounded people, and he turned to assist and to question him. The miserable man, a prey to that fearful thirst which tortures the dying on the battle-field, faintly implored for water, "It was no fair Toorkoman chappow," gasped the dying wretch, when his burning thirst was allayed. "It is all the work of that unsainted Semulghanee; and that misbegotten scoundrel, Goorg Allee: may he burn in hell!—That *his* spear should deal me my death-blow!—May his house be desolate and his tomb be defiled! — in a fair *meydaun* he would have gone down before me like chaff before the wind! — and now! — who shall avenge me?"

"My poor fellow," said Reza Koolee, assisting the wounded man to assume an easier attitude, as he writhed with pain and exhaustion, "compose yourself, and tell me what you know—who can tell but that I may yet reckon with this Goorg Allee, and exact from him the price of blood?—who are you, and what know you of this business?"

"Ah," said the man, "how can I tell — my breath is gone — I have no words — I was one of Sirafrauz Khan's gholaums — his confidential servant—there were few works of trust in which I had not my share—and he loved me—aye he loved me well — the vultures and the jackalls will have me now, as that old woman says — after all, it is the soldier's fate — one day or another—who can alter destiny? Well, sir — but for Allah's sake, a little more water — water — ah, thanks. — Two months since, the banou there desired to worship at the holy shrine of Imaun Reza at Mushed. She had made a vow, and prepared a rich present for the tomb. The young khanum was permitted to accompany her. The way was not long, and the country more at peace than usual. The khan sent for me, and said, 'Murdan Beg, take five gholaums, such as you can depend on; guard the harem to Mushed, and bring them safe back. Junâb Aga will accompany them. On your head be it.' 'Chushm!' replied I; 'and accordingly Murdan Beg carried them safe to Mushed. Their vows being paid, and duly performed, we waited for a caravan — it was small, but the banou was impatient — and so far had we come in safety, when, just before you came up, these ghorumsaug Toorkomans rushed down from the ravine yonder, and struck us. But it was all the Semulghanee's work — I knew the fellows well, and they knew us too."

"But why should Zekee Khan attack your master's people?—is there blood between you?"

"Blood? aye, and worse than blood — friendship despised and turned to hate. The fellow with a burnt father sought my master's daughter — the khan refused, as well he might — the other, they say, swore revenge. But who could have supposed

he would have dared this? — Aye, I knew them — good cause had I to know that dog, Goorg-Allee! —but I am going — this blood choaks me — I can't speak—and this accursed spear-head — it sticks in my very back-bone! — pluck it out — pluck it out in the name of God!— out with it, if you have any mercy, and let me die!" And the poor wretch, with a convulsive effort, threw aside his cloak, and griped at the splintered reed, that, all clotted with blood, protruded from his breast. The young chief felt for his agony, and grasping the fragment with a firm hand, pulled it forth from the deep wound. A piercing cry escaped from the dying man's lips; it was his last: an overwhelming rush of blood followed the weapon; the chest collapsed; and his limbs, with one long shudder, settled into the stillness of death.

Scarcely had he performed his act of mercy, when one of his followers came running up, and said — "My Lord had best be on his guard, for one of these Toorkoman dogs has been threatening us with sharp payment for our evening's work, and we gather that there are more of his fellows looking out for this very kafilah. The ghorumsaug was abusive; and Ahmed mehtur, like a fool, gave him a settling thrust with his spear — so we can get no more out of him: but doubtless we should leave this ground with all dispatch."

"Certainly," replied Reza Koolee; "move on as soon as you get the caravan together, and send out scouts. Let five men keep a-head, and look well among these hills to the right; it is from there we are to look for mischief, and we are now bound in honour to see these pilgrims safe over the sahrah."

Arrangements being at length complete, the caravan got once more sluggishly into motion. To

inter the dead would have occupied more precious time than could be spared even for the living, and so many of the beasts of burthen had been disabled, that to carry off many wounded would have been impossible. Fortunately these were not numerous, so leaving the scene of action strewed with broken bales of goods, fragments of kajawahs and shreds of torn clothes mingled with carcases of men and animals, the whole cavalcade continued its progress along the plain at the steady snail-like pace beyond which loaded camels cannot be urged.

During the march, which, in spite of the weary condition of the cattle, was continued throughout the night, Reza Koolee made it his study to ingratiate himself with the old woman, who, for want of a more commodious conveyance, bestrode a mule of which a lady had been dispossessed, while the banou and the young Leilah occupied the pair of kajawahs which formerly had been devoted to the younger lady and her aged attendant. Grateful for her deliverance, and attracted, doubtless, by the engaging person and manners of the young chief, the old lady became communicative, and readily informed him of such particulars as she knew, confirming all the unfortunate gholaum had said; and adding, that, to complete the misfortunes of the day, Aga Junâb, the favourite and faithful nazir of her master, had fallen with the rest of the gholaums in attempting to defend his charge. It was plain, she said, that the *Moonujoom*,* in whom they had trusted for choosing a favourable hour for their departure from Musked, was either a fool or a rogue; that their evil star had predominated, and that assuredly the mes-

* Astrologer.

sengers they had despatched to apprize the khan of their approach, had miscarried, or that the party, sent by his highness to bring them safe to Kallah Feerozeh, had missed them by taking some other way; for that he never could have trusted so precious a cargo to the dangers of the sahrah without adopting some measures for their safety.

She likewise made earnest entreaties to be informed of the name and quality of the person to whom her master was so deeply indebted, insinuating her conviction that his rank must equal the exalted nature of his gallantry and prowess. But Reza Koolee was too unwilling to risk his newly acquired and precious favour, by an avowal which, in identifying him with a family so much at variance with the Beyauts, must render him hateful to those with whom his whole desire was now to be on friendly terms. He, therefore, evaded an explicit reply as courteously as possible, assuring the old lady that he was the humble slave of her fair charge, and must, consequently, be the firm friend of her father. Nor did his conscience disclaim this as a departure from truth; for he felt that considerations of policy, or even the risk of life itself, would be as nothing compared with the growing regard he began to entertain for the father of his fair enslaver, and his hopes that he might one day possess her.

The night wore on without further incident, though not without alarm; for more than once the scouts rode in, declaring that sounds, as of the tramp of horses, and signals, had been heard among the mountains, and that an attack might assuredly be expected before they crossed the pass in their front. Yet hour after hour elapsed, without the threatened danger — the formidable *gurdunee* was traversed, without encountering either

friend or foe. They had now attained the verge of the district, which was considered as *ameen*, or safe; and Reza Koolee, who had his own reasons for wishing the true character and tribe of his followers to remain unknown, and who, with that view, had kept them as separate as possible from the caravan, felt that it was time to depart; but still anxious for his charge, and reluctant himself to lose sight of what was so precious to him, he adopted a course calculated to combine both objects. He explained to the old nurse, that in two hours they should reach an inhabited country, where no outrage was at all likely to be attempted, and that, as danger was past, he should dismiss the greater part of his people to the duty from which they had been taken, while he himself, with the remainder, should continue with the cafilah until within sight of Kallah Feerozeh.

To this arrangement, no objection could be made; and accordingly, selecting five of his most trusty men, the rest were dismissed with suitable orders. With this small band he continued to hover around the slow-moving mass, inspiring that confidence which the sense of protection affords—unfortunately, sometimes, as in this case, without foundation. A short time taught him to regret his precipitation; for, scarcely had they been an hour parted from their guards, when, just as the grey of the morning began to render objects visible, a small column of dust was observed arising from a chasm in the hills, and, in due time, a formidable body of horsemen issuing forth, made towards the travellers, with a deliberation that belonged either to friends satisfied of their safety, or to enemies, too sure of their prey to think precipitation necessary.

The heart of Reza Koolee misgave him at the

sight of these objects; but, instantly forming his resolution, he mustered his few adherents, and busied himself in preventing the utter confusion which generally occurs upon such an emergency. The camels were thrown into a mass which might resist the first charge of their fresh assailants, if such they were to prove: the boldest of the *sarwans* (or camel-drivers) got ready their arms, but they being chiefly spears and swords, with a few bows and arrows, could be of little avail until the contest became close. All who could got hastily out of the kajawahs, to be ready for seizing on any chance of escape that might present itself; but many of the pilgrims, old men and women, utterly helpless, remained where they were; the women screamed and groaned; the very mules seemed conscious of impending calamity, and, jaded as they were, kicked and flung at random.

In the midst of this uproar, down came the strange horsemen in a compact body, and soon, even in the imperfect light, the caps of the Toorkomans could be distinguished from the Koordish turbans. It was evident that they had made a long march; their jaded horses could scarcely be pricked into a charge; and all were soon satisfied, that in their present assailants they saw the fugitives from the late attack, reinforced by numbers which seemed hopelessly overwhelming. Reza Koolee was of the same opinion, but resolved, at the expense of life itself, to defend from pollution the fair creature who already owed him life and liberty; he disregarded the half-uttered remonstrances of his followers, and, relying on their tried devotion, issued his orders for the most available resistance. He directed that the approaching body should be assailed with flights of arrows— that its first and fiercest shock should be avoided

by the small party of horsemen, by wheeling aside and letting it expend itself upon the beasts of burthen and baggage, when a charge in flank might prove effectual. Above all, he charged his friends to watch over the Khanum's kajawahs, and to defend them from insult to the last.

In truth, the only hope of the young man was, that after the first disorder he might possibly find means, by mingling in the melee, to carry off, unheeded, from the scene of destruction, the being for whom he felt so deep an interest. His horse was jaded, it is true, by the unremitted toil of four and twenty hours, but, on its spirit and powers of endurance, he could depend; for the Attock could not furnish better blood, or bone, or wind, and surely the equally worn-out steeds of his enemies were not likely to possess greater vigour. Rapidly calculating these chances in his mind, with one eye fixed upon the fast-approaching enemy, and the other turning to the spot where the females were posted, and with lips compressed, and breath held in, he stood to abide the event.

The arrows of his men were rapidly delivered, and told well upon the advancing body, for more than one horse and man came tumbling to the ground; but the Toorkomans were no whit behind them in expertness, and their shot added to the terror and disorder of the cattle. All at once, when within some thirty yards, they opened out, showed an extended front, and clapping stirrups to their horses' flanks, charged with terrific shouts. In a moment, the muleteers and sarwans gave way, and shrinking in amongst the cattle, sought a momentary retreat from the fury of the attack. The animals themselves equally frightened, broke loose from all restraint, burst their harness, threw down their loads, and took to flight. All was

clearly lost — and Reza Koolee, calling on his own people, thought only of a last effort to save the daughter of the Beyaut chief. At the risk of being overwhelmed in the tumult, he dashed through the terrified camels, to the spot where the females had been placed, and reached it just at the moment when the khanum's camel, furious with fright, was striving to shake from its back the kajawah's which encumbered it. A single blow of his sword brought the animal, ham-strung, to the ground — another, as he sprung from his horse, cut the girths, and disentangled the kajawahs, in which lay the ladies, half-dead with terror and fatigue. A moment sufficed to extricate the shrinking Leilah from her narrow prison; and the words which he whispered as he caught her up and vaulted into his saddle, shot a ray of hope into her soul. "Fear not, lady, it is I, your slave — keep up your spirits, cling to me, and I will bear you off unharmed, were they a thousand.—Cossim," said he to his followers, "do you and Beiram save the banou, if possible, and follow me." Then goring his horse with the stirrup, he sprung over prostrate camels and mules, men and women; and, having extricated himself from the throng, kept the body of the fugitives between him and the enemy for awhile — then striking right forward, he trusted to the gloominess of the hour, and pushed with all the speed he could make, for the nearest village.

The rapidity with which they left the clamour and the tumult behind, revived the agitated Leilah; and even Reza Koolee himself began to entertain a hope, that in the general confusion, and still imperfect light, their flight had been unnoticed. But this comfortable delusion was of short continuance. Ere they had ridden a mile, the panting of the overloaded and wearied animal warned him

that to press too hard was to lose their only chance; and as he slackened his pace for a moment, and turned to look behind, it became evident that they were pursued. The plain, far and wide, was sprinkled with fugitives, mounted or on foot, attempting to escape from others who were striving to overtake them; but altogether distinct from these, a party of five or six horsemen had separated from the fray, and were following directly on their traces. Without uttering a word, but grasping his precious burthen yet more closely, and shaking his spear with a vow of fierce determination, he once more struck the wearied animal with his heels, mentally ejaculating — "On — on, good horse — hold but for a little longer! — shine out, my good star! now or never aid me!" and he had almost reached a turn in the valley, which he hoped might at least shut him out from the view of his pursuers, when the gallant horse struck its foot against a stone, stumbled, but recovered itself, tottered, stumbled again; and ere Reza Koolee could well fling himself back in the saddle, sank with its burthen to the ground.

It was a fearful moment; but even then—alone and at the mercy of his enemies, not a thought of his own impending fate crossed his brain—he could but gaze in agony upon the senseless form which still clung to him, a victim, as he feared, to the expedient he had devised as the only chance of saving her. The close approach of the enemy recalled him to a recollection of his situation. Gently laying his insensible burthen at his feet, he grasped his spear, and stood firm to receive them. As they came rapidly on, there were two before the rest, and he could even distinguish their voices. "It is them, Goorg Allee — it is certainly them," said one. "Good — kill him, be sure, but take

her alive," was the reply. "Hah! is it so?" muttered the young man—"then for thee, and for the price of blood;" and planting one foot upon the body of his fallen horse, he rapidly threw forward his shield, which had hung upon his shoulder, and placing his spear in rest, kept a wary eye upon his antagonists.

The spear of Goorg Allee struck and splintered on the shield, while that of the young chief, grazing and tearing open the neck of his assailant's horse, entered its master's shoulder, and bore him to the ground; but on the other hand, the weapon of the second, disregarded by Reza Koolee, passed under his left arm, and inflicted a ghastly wound in his side. The youth believed it was his death-blow.—"Allah! Allah!" shouted he; and drawing his sword in his agony, he struck two rapid blows: the first nearly divided the head of the horse; the second lighted on the rider's leg, which it shore in twain, and both lay grovelling on the ground. Reeling as he was with exertion and with pain, Reza Koolee prepared himself to meet the rest of his pursuers, now close upon him; but the conflict must have speedily terminated with his life, had not all further advance been in an instant checked by the trampling of a fresh body of horse, which just at that moment came rapidly round the hill, and pushed into a gallop the moment they saw the fray.

"Goor-e-pidurish! the Beyauts," exclaimed the foremost, reining up sharp—"Away, Goorg Allee, away!" "May the curse of Allee light on them!" exclaimed the wounded man—"Again baffled!—but spear that ghorumsaug—for I'm disabled—and then help me off."

"Punah-be khodah! Away, man—away! before it be too late!—we must reckon with these

another time!" And with these words, seizing the rein of his companion, who had just remounted his horse, he turned their faces to the hills, pursued by some of the strangers.

In the mean time, sick and faint, Reza Koolee Khan had sunk upon the ground beside Leilah, who had by that time awoke to consciousness; and well it was for him that she was capable of perception and exertion; for, as the strangers came thundering on heedless and reckless, they would assuredly have sacrificed one found in a situation so equivocal as that of the young chief. But Leilah rising to her feet, and throwing her person before him in her turn, exclaimed, "Beyauts? said they not Beyauts?—Oh, men, if ye regard the name of Sirafrauz Khan, respect his child, and harm not her deliverer."

They reined up at once, rather struck by the singularity of the scene, than in consequence of her words, which were lost in the thundering of hoofs and the shouts of the riders; but the pause enabled the maiden to repeat her address; on which the leader riding up, soon satisfied himself that she was indeed the daughter of Sirafrauz Khan, and respectfully intimated that he had been sent by that chief in quest of the very caravan which had thus twice been so nearly annihilated. A few words made him acquainted with the state of affairs, and leaving some of his followers to assist the lady and her defender, he pushed forward to the rescue of the rest. But before they could reach the spot, the marauders had already left it. Foiled on the preceding evening, Goorg Allee, the leader of the Semulghanees, had dogged the caravan, until joined by a division which had gone in quest of the same object, by a different route, and tempted by the departure of so large a body of their defenders,

he resolved on a second attack, when the effects of fatigue and exhaustion must, as he concluded, have greatly diminished their power of resistance. But so soon as the Semulghanees perceived themselves foiled in their principal object (that of securing the person of Leilah) they abandoned the worthless booty, and made the best of their way homewards.

The shattered caravan, once more collected, again pursued its way to the *munzilgah*, or resting-place, at the time not far distant, under convoy of the Beyauts. Next morning early, Reza Koolee, pale and stiff with his wounds, appeared before the munzilgah, and solicited an interview with the old nurse. "By the blessing of God" said he, "mother, you are now safe; and I thank the benificent Allah for making me the instrument of his mercy. If the khan should inquire who it was that enjoyed the happiness of escorting you thus far, say to him, a stranger from a distant part, who may one day claim his notice."

"La illah-il-ullah!" exclaimed the old lady, in great amazement — "are you not going with us to Kallah Feerozeh? Ah! the khan is the noble and generous master! — your reward is certain — you must go, of course."

"Be satisfied, my good mother — that cannot be just now. Here I must leave you; and if I have found favour with you, speak not, I pray, of my departure to any one. Present my respectful duty to your young mistress — solicit her acceptance of this talisman from one who would willingly have died for her; it is powerful against all illness and the evil eye. And you, dear mother, accept this for my sake —" and he placed in her hand a small purse, heavy with gold.

"Allah! Allah!" sobbed the nurse, her heart melted, and her eyes running over, by the magical

touch of the gold—"what wonders have we here? Behold! a young man, who performs deeds worthy of a Roostum, and gets half killed, all in the service of a generous and noble chief—and, instead of waiting on him for the due reward, he flings his gold around as if he were a shahzadeh, and away he goes, scarcely able to crawl with his wounds! Punah-be khodah! this will never do!"

"Fear not for me, mother—I shall do well, and all shall be cleared up in due time: meantime, do not forget me; and if any one shall bring you this token, receive him for my sake—the third moon shall not pass without news of me. As for your lovely charge, what can I say?—my heart is burning, my brains dried up! Tell her she is the star of my destiny,—when she shines not, then is my fate darkened, and my soul is troubled. Tell her I am her slave, ever ready to lay down my life for her! May God protect you, mother!" and, without biding further question or reply, he quitted the place and she saw him no more.

"La illa-il-ullah!" muttered the old lady, thoroughly confounded; "we see strange things!—*aajib-ust!*—it is wonderful!—what a noble, generous youth! so beautiful, so brave!—who can he be?—a mighty lord or chief assuredly!—but how came he among us, and at such a time too?—wonderful! Well, let me go to my dear child—heaven help her when she hears he is gone!—but, inchallah! he will surely come again—yes, we shall see him as he ought to be, please God, as some prince or great chief, and my pearl of beauty will then be made happy!"

CHAPTER III.

THE DURGAH.

About a month after this event, when the interest and discussions which it had occasioned had, in great measure subsided, a young man of prepossessing appearance presented himself at the gate of the Kallah Feerozeh, as a candidate for service among the gholaums of Sirafrauz Khan. He was equipped in the military fashion of the country, was tall, broad-shouldered, slender in the waist, active, perfectly skilled in the martial exercises of the time, and brought his own horse and arms. His face, of a dark sallow hue, was remarkable for its sweet and noble expression; and the keen scrutinizing glance of the khan, as the young man announced himself merely as Allee Sheer, the son of a zabut near Toorbut, seeking for service, sufficiently announced *his* surprise and suspicions. "By the soul of my father! young man," said he, "I should rather have believed thee hadst thou declared thyself son of the Karaowee chief himself: the honest zabut may be proud of his son. Would to heaven," murmured he, in an under voice, "that the chief of Beyaut had such a one to maintain the fortunes of his house, and keep

his lamp burning when he dies!" But short probation was required to place the young aspirant on the list of the first-rate gholaums; and, from that day forward, he rose rapidly in estimation, both with his officers and his master.

On the same day that the young gholaum appeared, a slave of the khanums presented to the old nurse a tablet of toorquoise. "Allahkereem!" exclaimed she, starting at the sight of it, "where got you this?"

"It was given me, so please you, by the new gholaum, whom the khan this day took into his service."

"And where is the youth, girl?"

"He waits without, at your service, by the ruined archway near the well."

"Aajib!—wonderful!" muttered the old woman—and throwing on her veil, and taking her slippers, she hurried out after the young slave.

The young gholaum was standing in the spot where he had been left by his conductress. The old lady gazed at him for some time, endeavouring in vain to recognise his person. At length wearied with conjecture, she showed the tablet, and demanded—"Art thou he who hast brought this?"

"I am, lady," said he.

"And from whence and from whom hast thou brought it?"

"I received it," replied the young man, "from one who himself showed it to thee."

"Aajib!" again muttered the nurse—"and where may he now be, young gholaum?"

"Dismiss thy attendant," replied he, "such discourse should only be in private—the stones they say have ears."

The slave-girl having retired, the gholaum changing his voice, said in another accent—"And hast

thou then in truth forgotten me, mother? the disguise must then be complete."

"Allah il-ullah!" exclaimed the old woman — "it is magic! — can it be thou thyself, my son? and hast thou at length learned wisdom? — Does the khan know thee?"

"The khan knows me not, mother — and for the present must not. To thee, alone, do I entrust my secret — and thou wilt keep it, when I tell thee it may affect my life."

"Penah-be-khodah! — thy life! and who would dare ——?"

"Be satisfied, mother — my words are true — even the khan himself might be unable to protect me — but thou shalt know more hereafter. In the meantime, say how is the light of my eyes? hath she yet forgot her slave of the sahrah?"

"Wullah! — you know her not — forget thee? no, truly, poor child. Not a day — scarce an hour passes, without her talking of that terrible day and night — no, no! — She is not ungrateful — and, holy Fatimah! the talisman thou gavest her has magic in it, surely, for she will not part with it — no, not for one moment. To others she speaks of it as a Mushedee relique, and that it is her life, her soul — and she gazes on it, and speaks to it till her eyes fill with tears. Verily, young man, thou art dangerous; I think that gold thou didst bestow on me, must have lain near the talisman; for I feel as if I loved thee liked a son! — pardon an old fool like me, for saying so."

It may be presumed that the young man easily pardoned the old nurse's garrulity, when it ran in such a vein. He besought her to continue, to tell him all she knew — every particular about her dear child: and when she could neither speak nor tarry longer, he poured out his soul in thanks —

"Believe me, I am not unworthy of your favour, or that of your beautiful child," said he — "I am now on duty here — we may thus meet often without suspicion — and the time will soon come, when you shall both understand on whom you have bestowed it. I leave my cause in your hands."

"May your favour increase, sir — when you would see me, ask for the old nana, Atougha—Noor bukhsh there, the slave-girl, or Toka ferosh will always convey to me your message. — May God protect you!"

Notwithstanding the great, and probably sincere regard which the old nana professed for him, Reza Koolee still dreaded to disclose to her the important but dangerous secret of his name and family, nor was it until convinced, beyond the possibility of doubt, of her unalterable and devoted esteem, that he ventured to astonish her with the fact. Need *we* explain the motives of his conduct?—his object in the strange and perilous step he had thus taken? Need we say, that the one long, fatal look which he obtained of the young and lovely Leilah on that eventful evening, trembling and terror-struck as she was, like a captive angel among incarnate fiends, had fixed his fate for ever?—that he would not have exchanged the fierce and dangerous moments — when clasping her to his breast, he had borne her from the furious throng, had fought over her prostrate body, and bled at her feet — for all the blessings and glory that life could give without her.

Nor were the effects of this eventful rencounter confined to the youth alone. The reader has already had occasion to see that the object of his adoration participated in his feelings, although, in her, they were modified by female delicacy, and the timidity of her age and gentle disposition. Leilah

had, in truth, reached a period of life when the female mind is most susceptible of such impressions. Ardent and tender, with a heart overflowing with kindly affections, and keenly alive to the splendours of gallantry and glory, it was not to be wondered at that the first young and handsome gallant who should cross her path should make a powerful impression on her imagination. Comparatively little secluded, after the manner of the tribes, the form of man was no stranger to the eyes of Leilah; but those whom she usually saw in the dwelling of her father were little calculated to give rise to dangerous emotions. Elderly khans and meerzas, rough and scarred veterans, or menials, who passed without observation — such were the only specimens of the lords of the creation that met her view; for her brother, Abbas Koolee, though a handsome boy, was too young to afford any idea of noble and manly beauty. Thus Leilah, although just at the age when the heart begins to require an object, and the imagination to form one, was still "fancy free." When, therefore, in the hour of imminent peril, a protector made his appearance, sent as if by heaven itself, brave, fierce, impetuous, dashing her enemies to the earth with a blow—yet gentle, tender, respectful to her—casting himself and all his glories at her feet, and withal more beautiful and gracious than her warmest dreams had ever pictured — how could her heart resist so powerful an assault, or fail to receive an impression never to be obliterated?

The affection of her nurse soon discovered the secret of a heart which, in truth, had never known disguise, nor felt a wish that could summon a blush upon its owner's countenance. The subject of their past dangers, and of him who had delivered them, was a never failing theme of conversa-

tion; and the hours that were spent in dwelling on his praises, in speculating on his rank, and name, and country, and wondering whether he would ever again be seen by them, tended to fix and perpetuate impressions already deep and permanent — to add fuel to a flame which already burned too fiercely.

Leilah, in the old nana's estimation, was the first of created beings: to have saved her life and honour was, therefore, the most meritorious of all services; and when the person who rendered this service chanced, according to her partial opinion, to be one who rivalled Zal and Roostum in valour, and Yussuff himself in beauty and virtue, how could her judgment fail of following the impulse of her heart, and of contemplating, in this gifted deliverer, the only fitting mate in all the world for her darling Leilah. Yet, notwithstanding this partiality, and the less scrupulous customs of the tribes in regard to female liberty, the principles and notions of propriety of the old nana, accustomed as she was to the harem of a chief, revolted from lightly trespassing on the rules of Asiatic decorum, or consenting to indulge the lovers in clandestine interviews. It is true, that, wrought upon by the eager impatience of Reza Koolee, and touched by the pallid looks and absent air of her dear child, she did at length agree to convey such messages or tokens of eternal devotion on the one hand, and diffident confessions of gratitude and regard upon the other, as were pressed upon her by the lovers: but this, for a while, was the extent of her compliance—for a while, we say, for it was a state of things that could not continue long. The prudence of the old nurse yielded, after a decent time, to the young man's importunity, and she consented to obtain for him an interview, in

her presence, with her who was the "light of his eyes," and the "life of his soul."

At the foot of the hills which bounded the great plain, about three miles distant from the fortress of Kallah Feerozeh, were the remains of a village, now utterly decayed, but which had, at one time, enjoyed considerable celebrity as a place of pilgrimage or worship for the neighbourhood. In the rocks which nearly overhung the village, there was a cavern of small dimensions, the interior of which was blackened by the smoke of many ages arising from the fires of a succession of recluses who had dwelt there; for close before the entrance was a huge flat slab of rock, on the surface of which some freak of chance or of nature had worn two deep holes, in which the fervent imagination of the faithful saw a likeness to the impression of two hoofs. These were affirmed to be the foot-tramps of Dul-dul, the celebrated mule of Allee, an animal whose traces are liberally scattered over all countries inhabited by true believers. The place had thus obtained the appellation of *Kudum-moobarik*, "the august foot-print," and had become at once the resort of the pious, and the abode of the enthusiast or the impostor, who preyed upon the superstitions and the weakness of their fellows.

Besides this holy relique, a tomb was shewn in the village beneath, in a square structure of sun-dried brick, surmounted by a *goombuz* or conical dome of the same material. This was designated as the resting-place of a certain Imaumzadeh, that is, a descendant from one of the Imaums, named Hussun Allee. Both of these places were held in high repute, as *durgahs*, or places of religious resort of great sanctity throughout the country round. Miracles were even wrought at them,

and, in course of time, a village, known indifferently by the names of Kudum-Moobarik, and Imaumzadeh Hussun Allee, sprung up and flourished under the influence of the shrines and their worshippers. Nor were these holy places at any time in want of ministers to blazen forth their virtues, to put the pilgrims who flocked thither through the appointed forms of worship, or, occasionally, to enact the performance of a miracle; at all times to receive their fees and fleece their willing dupes to the utmost extent of credulity on the one hand, and power of deception on the other. Dervishes, fakeers, moollahs, disciples and khadums (i. e. menial servants) swarmed around the place, and crowds of pilgrims came flocking to rejoice in the sanctity of the durgah, and augment the prosperity of the village and the perquisites of its pious inhabitants.

But permanence is not the lot even of holy things in this world; and the *Kudum-Moobarik* was destined to prove the mutability of sublunary affairs. As the troubles of the land increased, and the country was wasted by domestic broils, travelling grew dangerous; the conflux of pilgrims gradually diminished, and with them the profits of the priests and derveshes declined, until at length they departed, one by one, in search of better fortune. The village itself fell into decay, and at length was utterly destroyed and its inhabitants carried off into slavery in an incursion of the Toorkomans, who paid little regard to the worshippers of a Sheah saint. The place since then has remained desolate, but was still the occasional resort of a few fakeers and worn-out moollahs; and when, from the efforts of Sirafrauz Khan, the neighbourhood again became comparatively populous, the durgah once more recovered its popu-

larity so far as to be resorted to by all who had a vow to make, or who wished to purchase charms, or philtres, or talismans from the holy strangers who frequented it. In truth there were not wanting those who profanely charged it with being the scene of many an intrigue; but either the scandal was too broad to be popular, or the place too convenient to suffer much from malignant report, and so the whispers were either hushed up or disregarded.

At the period of our tale, the durgah and village of Kudum-Moobarik, could boast but of one permanent inhabitant — an old man known by the appellation of Moollah Yashur, who, in addition to the religious duties he imposed on himself, told fortunes, predicted events, calculated nativities, found lucky hours for all undertakings, and sold tusbees (or rosaries), charms, talismans, and pats of praying-clay, from Kerbelah, or elsewhere. The moollah was a withered old man, with a shape bent by age, a sharp countenance looking upwards from between his shoulders, a keen black eye, and a beard as white as snow. His dress consisted of a very wretched *kaaba*, over which were flung the remains of a black Arab cloak; and his head was covered with a huge green turban, of most fantastic shape.

The spot where he had taken up his abode, was striking from its loneliness. In former times, the Imaumzadeh had been surrounded by a mud wall, now ruinous; and the area thus inclosed, having been originally planted with trees, had been used as a burying-ground. Of the trees, two noble old pines and a chinar of magnificent spread and great height, still remained; while the whole area was scattered over with grave-stones, many of which were broken or decayed. A stream, which issued

from a spring in the mountain near the cave, had been trained to wander through the inclosure, which thus exhibited the unusual spectacle of a soft green turf. Beneath the shade of the three remaining trees, were the remains of a building, probably a tomb of the olden time, as ancient as the Imaumzadeh itself. This ruin, patched up, and a little enlarged, formed the moollah's dwelling; and in front of it, in the cool shade near the rivulet, used he to sit for hours, like the inhabitant of some forgotten world, come to gaze on the ruins of this. It was a strange and impressive scene. The tall grey dome of the Imaumzadeh, in its ruined inclosure — the skeleton-like walls of the deserted village — the gravestones themselves dropping to decay, amid the numerous green mounds, like the nameless dead whom they sought in vain to commemorate — the tall fantastic fir-trees, with their sombre hue, relieved against the arid mountains — even the figure of the old moollah, motionless and fixed, like the last remnant of a depopulated land — all, all was still and lifeless, save the streamlet speeding with ceaseless murmur, to lose itself in the desert — an apt emblem of the life of man, fretting and brawling on, to be swallowed up in the ocean of eternity!

Yet the scene was not always thus solitary or silent; for often, as we have said, would the neighbouring villagers repair to the shrine with offerings and prayers. Its most frequent visitors were females, who came, some in the close chequered veil which shrowds the city-dame, but oftener less perfectly concealed by the slight 'kerchief which the women of the tribes wear over the lower part of the countenance. Others sought not even this protection from the gaze of strangers; for in truth the lower orders of Persian villagers but slightly re-

gard such refinements. Their light-hearted babble and loud ringing laugh might often be heard from a distance, as they entered the ruined walls, disturbing with incongruous sounds the customary and solemn stillness of the sacred durgah.

Here, then, would the females of the khan's family frequently resort for purposes of devotion or amusement;—for not a little of the latter was usually anticipated by the gay parties that frequented the Imaumzadeh; and here it was that old Atougha purposed to bring about the first interview between the lovers. In justice to Leilah it must be told that on her part the meeting was wholly unpremeditated and unexpected. The unsuspecting girl, when the party was proposed by her nurse, dreamt of nothing beyond relieving by a little variety the anxiety which weighed upon her mind, and somewhat diverting her thoughts from their one exclusive object—or pouring out her heart, perchance in prayer, for him who was daily becoming more and more dangerously dear. It was only when the nana led her from the tomb to a retired spot among the ruins, and when she saw issuing from them a figure which made her start with indescribable emotions, that the purpose of her ancient attendant dimly dawned upon her soul. Another eager yet fearful glance, and doubt was at an end.—It was he,--it was her preserver,—the loved one himself—the form that haunted her dreams by night,—the living image of her waking thoughts! The visions of her secret soul—the scarce formed aspirations of her heart were all accomplished—but their realization came upon her with such fearful suddenness as totally to overwhelm her.—Overcome at once with terror and delight, she clasped both hands upon her veiled face, and tottering backwards would have fallen to the

ground, had not her lover rushed forward and caught her in his arms.

It was now the turn of others to be alarmed.—Intent only on gratifying the lovers, the nurse had never calculated the effect which so serious a surprise might produce upon a heart so sensitive and unpractised as that of Leilah; and as she gazed on the pale face of her darling child, she broke out into violent exclamations against her own incautious folly, mingled with pathetic adjurations to revive and bless her with the sound of her voice,—the light of her re-opening eyes.

The alarm of Reza Koolee was neither so clamorous nor so bewildering. Conscious that his own sudden appearance alone had caused the evil, he trusted that the shock, though sudden, could not be severe,—that her terror must soon subside, and give way to emotions more gratifying to a lover's heart. Meanwhile he felt that he once more clasped to his breast the being whose image was enshrined there; and he thought of those dear, yet far more terrible moments, when he bore her from the dangers of the fray, and from amid the weapons of her enemies. Yet even this intoxicating delight gave way to fear, as he saw that the cheek of Leilah continued pale, and that no throb or movement announced the return of life; and he called to the bewildered nana—"In the name of Allah, nurse—for the love of the blessed Imaum, fetch hither water—see, yonder runs the stream."

"Ahi wahi! ahi wahi!" exclaimed the poor creature.—"Wretch that I am!—what dust has fallen upon my old head to-day!" but the mention of water gave a turn to her thoughts, and she hurried off to bring it.

In the meantime, Reza Koolee, with fears every moment increasing, supported his inanimate bur-

then. Emboldened by the emergency, he tore away the already displaced veil, and saw with horror the damp dew gathering on the pale forehead, and the dimness of the half open glazed eye, and his heart sunk within him when he thought that even at the moment, life might be slowly departing. He groaned in agony, and caught her still closely to his bosom, frantically impressed a shower of kisses on the clayey cheeks, uttering at the same time expressions of the warmest endearment.

Whether it was the fervour of these caresses, or the ardour of his words that operated as a stimulus upon the maiden's faltering spirit, or whether it was the cool air which now blew freely on her exposed face, that quickened into action the reviving powers of life, we do not take upon us to say; but it is certain, that a slight shudder in the maiden's limbs prognosticated a speedy return to animation; and the heart of Reza Koolee leapt within him as he saw the ashy hue of the cheek gradually disappear, and the opening eye resume its intelligence. Consciousness soon returned, and the burning blush, and the eye once more contracted by terror, proved that Leilah was now fully awake to the danger of her situation. Yet could not the youth refrain from clasping once more to his heart her reanimated form, as he poured out a passionate avowal of his devoted love.

By the time the nurse returned, Leilah had freed herself from his arms, and was endeavouring to adjust her disordered dress. Instantly flying to the old woman, she exclaimed reproachfully — "Oh, Nana, what have you done? what madness has possessed you?"

"Ahi, pearl of my eyes! what words are these?" replied the old woman, overjoyed at the recovery

of her charge—" Could I have imagined that you would have taken it thus?—you who have so often declared that you had no greater wish."

" Hush, in the name of Allah!" exclaimed Leilah, with a glow like scarlet, and putting her hand upon her nurse's mouth—" We have been here too long—let us depart."

" Lady," said Reza Koolee respectfully, " it is I alone that am to blame—if it be blame to have pined for a sight of her who is to me the star of my destiny, the lamp of my soul—let me entreat ——"

" Oh! leave me—leave me!" gasped Leilah—" for the sake of Allah, begone!—is it not enough?—you know it is a sin—" and the terror with which she shrunk from his gentle approach, struck a chill upon the heart of Reza Koolee.

" It is well," said he, after a pause, with mournful bitterness—it is fit that my presumption should thus be checked—an outcast and a beggar without home or fortune, I might have known that hope was vain—that such a one had no right to aspire to the daughter of Sirafrauz Khan.—Yet I fondly thought the day might come when my sword or my better star might raise my head from the dust—I had yet to learn that I was an object of abhorrence to Leilah—it is the last drop of a bitter cup, but little did I think to drink it at your hands, lady!"

"In the name of Allah, my child, what is it that you mean?" exclaimed the nurse, impatiently. " Can you deny that you desired to see the man who saved your life?—and could it be wrong to do so?—Can you deny that you love him?—is it not natural you should? Then how is it that you seek to blacken our faces this day, when we have only wished to give you pleasure?—Where is that

Leilah who was the delight of all, and the pride of your old nurse's heart?"

"Allah! Allah!" exclaimed Leilah, wringing her hands in painful perplexity, "what can I do —Ah, nurse! what words are these?—Heaven direct me!—Oh, I am not ungrateful — but — "

The watchful eye of her lover marked the change of feeling and caught the happy moment. Again he approached and clung to the skirts of her robe, where he was not repulsed. The discreet nana, satisfied that the storm was past, retired, and left the lovers to a short but undisturbed felicity. In prudence we shall follow her example, nor attempt to paint a scene which, however engrossing to those concerned, might prove tedious in description. It is enough to say that all fears and doubts were at an end, the heart of Reza Koolee beat high with delight, and the timid eyes of Leilah swam in joyful tears — but the taper fingers were gently raised and the shroud again let fall over the blushing face and trembling form, ere the confession, which entranced his soul, issued in scarce audible whispers from her lips, which told him that his love was returned — that if she could not be his, she never at least would be another's.

The subsequent interviews which took place from time to time between the lovers, we must likewise refrain from enumerating or describing: sweet draughts of bliss they were, in the parching wilderness of absence and separation — bright links that drew into still closer contact hearts already fast bound by the ties of mutual affection. In truth, however, it was but a small share of the young man's time that could be so delightfully occupied, for, in his capacity as gholaum, he was constantly employed by his master upon arduous enterprizes or duties requiring cou-

rage and fidelity; and so well did he acquit himself of these behests, and such zeal and ability did he display, that he speedily came to be considered as one of the most trustworthy and confidential of the khan's adherents.

When Reza Koolee had resolved upon the desperate measure which placed him so completely at the mercy of a hereditary foe, for an object which the prudent and the aged alone will condemn, on quitting Mianabad, he communicated his determination only to two individuals; these were his friend Meerza Seleem, and his sister Guleyaz. The Meerza, after a vain attempt at remonstrance, promised faithfully to watch over his interests, which in fact, were, at the time so circumstanced, that they could not suffer by his absence; and to communicate from time to time such changes or events as might occur. But this was a service to be executed with extreme caution, as the Kallah Feerózeh was no place for messengers from Mianabad, nor would an intercourse with his tribe have, in any degree, tended to promote the objects for which he had risked his life and liberty. With his sister, Reza Koolee had no concealments; and though her clear unprejudiced judgment united with fraternal affection, in condemning the rashness of his intended enterprize, that very affection shrunk from the thought of giving him pain by fruitless remonstrance, and she rather turned her attention to the means of promoting his views and providing for his safety, should circumstances occur to place it in jeopardy. To her the young chief principally trusted for early intelligence of the intrigues of the underoon, and, assured of possessing two such confederates in the very camp of the enemy, he embarked with the greater confidence in his daring adventure.

Months passed on in the way we have described, and many a leisure hour did the young gholaum spend in the spot which was occasionally blessed by the presence of his lovely mistress. There would he linger, tracing back the fleeting moments in which he had felt the beating of her heart as it throbbed upon his breast, in which he had heard the music of her voice, or inhaled the fragrance of her breath; and it is related, that he actually composed certain ghuzls or odes, descriptive of her beauty and his love, as he sat upon the bank where they had often reposed.

It was but two days previous to the incident with which our narrative opens, that, having repaired to the Kudum-Moobarik, he was met by the old moollah, who, taking him into his own cell, with a mysterious air placed a packet in his hand, and fixing his keen eyes upon his face, took his seat in his accustomed corner. On opening the packet, Reza Koolee started at finding that it contained a dagger and a pair of pigeon's wings. A vague idea of danger crossed his mind, and, turning to the moollah, he said—"Behold, a strange present—or token, is it, moollah?—thou art wise and learned, old friend—canst thou read me this riddle!"

"I would state," replied the moollah, "that the meaning has not reached the comprehension of your servant—it is plain that they are tokens; and if a conjecture might be hazarded, from the hand of a friend——"

"And what be your idea of their signification, moollah?"

"I beg humbly to represent that your servant is as nothing—he is less than the least—yet something he may venture to suggest—may not these wings of swiftness be meant as an emblem of flight? may not that weapon be a warning of danger, and

an injunction to prepare against it? Such, in truth, seems probable, from the message delivered by him who brought the packet this morning."

"A message? and what might it be? — quick — why do you not tell, old man?"

"Allah! Allah! be not so hasty — I would represent that the packet was handed to your servant, by a man in the garb of a fakeer — Mashallah! I have learned to distrust the dress — the koolla does not always make the dervesh! — but his words were these — 'Prudence, not less than prowess,' saith the proverb, 'becometh the brave; and where arms would fail, flight may save.'"

"Aye? said he so?" muttered the young man — "by the head of my father, the sense is not doubtful — but what and from whence may be the danger? — that is now the only doubt." And, as he mechanically turned over the envelope, which had covered the tokens, a small paper parcel fell from its folds. On opening it, he found a ruby ring, which he instantly recognised as one belonging to his sister — "Allah-il-ullah! this indeed makes it plain!" said he; but, restraining further emotion, he hastily interrogated the old man further, regarding the appearance and conduct of the messenger. But it appeared that nothing more was to be learned. The fakeer, content with delivering his packet and message, had immediately departed; and the young chief, after a little further conversation with the moollah, said significantly — "Very well — all is right," and hastily left the place.

On his way homeward, Reza Koolee pondered over the significant warning he had received. Gladly would he have had it more explicit; but that would have seriously increased the danger of discovery; and even if a written note could have been safely trusted, there were few of that country

and period who could have read it. He racked his brain to conjecture from whence the danger might probably be apprehended — but in vain. Sometimes he was led to consider it an intimation of the time having arrived for striking some effectual blow at home, and an invitation to repair thither; but neither tokens nor message would bear out such an interpretation. At other moments, he feared that his disguise was penetrated, and his views discovered: but of this no symptoms had as yet appeared; and he had already hazarded too much, to dream of abandoning his post, until he should be convinced of its being tenable no longer. All was dark and mysterious — without a friend to consult, he could resolve on nothing, but to continue vigilant and prepared — to watch every movement around him, and be ready for flight or resistance at the first moment of alarm, as circumstances might direct him.

The day wore on in this uncertainty. Orders had been issued by the khan for a muster of his military force; and an expedition of importance was assuredly in preparation. It was no time for a confidential servant to shrink from his duty — and Allee Sheer Gholaum was, as usual, among the first to appear on the maidaun. Near the gate of the fort, on his way to the dur-khaneh, his eye fell upon a group of strangers; and the peculiar countenance of one among them arrested his attention — it was the sinister visage of his late antagonist, Goorg Allee Beg, which was glaring upon him with irrepressible malignity. That instant, his danger flashed upon him — the object of the warning was clear; but it was too late — the hour of escape had elapsed — flight was impossible, for the whole village swarmed with armed and mounted men, and he could not know how far a watch might already be placed on his actions.

It was a situation of extreme perplexity, and for a moment Reza Koolee hesitated how to act. It was not that he felt appalled by the danger of his critical position — from mere personal peril he never would have shrunk; but to think of being caught, like a fox in the snare, after risking and attaining so much — of failing in the very moment, as it were, of triumph and success, and losing life, and love, and all, at a blow! — it was insufferably mortifying; and to avoid so humiliating, so intolerable a consummation, was worth a struggle at least. From the khan himself, high in his favour as he had stood, he felt that he had little to dread; and could he have appealed at once to his honour and generosity, unbiassed by the influence of others, he would not have hesitated a moment to do so. But, should the discovery of his real condition be suddenly made, might he not be torn to pieces in the first impulse of popular feeling, ere he could make his way to the presence? Even should he effect that measure, and should the chief desire to save him, was it certain that his power might be sufficient? would his influence with the tribe be strong enough to resist the eager demands for his blood, that would undoubtedly be made by those with whom he was at feud? One only expedient remained to avert these dangers, to afford time for men's passions to cool, and for justice and hospitality to assert their claims. "I will fly to the *bust* of the stable," thought he, "and there I will remain till the first violence of the storm be overblown — for the rest, khodah bugorg ust! God is great!" And, without a moment's delay, he put his resolution in practice, as the reader has already seen.

Such was the substance of the young chief's explanation, which our narrative has necessarily extended greatly, and which the khan more shortly

made known to the assembly. "And now, khan," continued he, "in Reza Koolee Khan behold your servant—your devoted friend—why should I be called an enemy, when my heart is with your house? Who are my family, that I should take up their quarrels? What service has my uncle rendered to me or to my tribe, that I should espouse his cause? If there be blood of the Beyauts upon my hand, behold me ready to wash it off in that of their enemies—prove me as thou wilt—thou hast seen me fight for thee—let my blood be ever shed in thy defence—let me die for thee, if thou seest fit to demand my life—but deprive me not of hope—take not from me all that can make life worth preserving."

Having spoken thus, the young man held his peace; but as he stood with his noble figure raised to its full height, and his countenance glowing with the agitation of the occasion, he presented to his hearers such a picture of manly beauty, that another involuntary burst of applause arose among them; nor could those, even, who had been most clamorous for his death, withhold their tribute of admiration. The movement at length subsided, and all eyes were then turned upon the khan, who drawing himself up upon his seat, prepared to address the prisoner.

"Young chief," said he, it is but just to say that thou hast pleaded thy cause well; and Sirafrauz Khan would be the last in Khorasan, to shut his eyes on the gallantry and generosity of an enemy, or to shrink from acknowledging a benefit. But Sirafrauz Khan is the father as well as the ruler of his tribe; and while they hearken to his word and obey his voice, they look up to him for equal justice—for redress of wrongs—for the protection of their honour—each question that comes before him

must be weighed with impartiality. The public, claims his first attention; — to that his private interests must always be postponed. Now listen to my words — Thou art, young chief, a hereditary enemy — there are claims of blood against thee here, and the heart of many a Beyaut burns for revenge. But thou camest to us as a stranger — voluntarily threw thyself on our hospitality. — If we unadvisedly received thee, without due inquiry, the fault was ours; and it were no justice to visit it upon thee. Thou hast eaten of our salt, and hast been faithful to that sacred debt; thou hast a witness in all who know thee for zeal and fidelity, for honest devotion in the service thou didst engage for. — With a Turkish tribe, which prides itself on its honour and hospitality, this might be of itself enough — but this is not the whole — thou hast taken that sanctuary which is most sacred amongst us, and thou didst well in so doing — for when the heart burns the arm is ready. — Thou mayest have saved our hands from the stain of murder; — but now, with thy hand on the headstall and mine oath in thine ear, hadst thou killed mine own son, I dared not have harmed thee. Accursed be the oath-breaker! accursed be he who violates the sanctuary! — Therefore I pronounce thee free — free to pass hence unarmed, and to the extent of our country thou mayest claim guidance and protection — beyond, we give no pledge. — So far for public duty. Uncle, I hear thy voice, but mine ears must be closed against its strong appeal. Turn not thy rayless eyes towards me — the blood of our guest and servant could not restore their light. — Thy heart swells old Baba Beg; but the life of one under the *bust* would not replace that of thy gallant sons. — The oaths of chiefs must be sacred; honour and

good faith their first considerations—and, inchallah! we need not shake our swords at men whose hands are bound — we shall have full scope, ere we grow old, to seek an honourable revenge.

"And now, young chief, for what regards myself — I owe thee the honour of my harem, the life of my child. Something of this zeal, it may be, should be placed to account of her beauty and your passion; but the debt is not the less sacred, nor seek I to diminish its amount. Behold me ready to discharge it, so far as my ability extends; — yet pause and beware — persist not in thy rash request, for in that I am powerless — the disposal of my family affects the interests of my tribe, and how could I bestow my daughter upon a hereditary foe?"

The countenance of Reza Koolee, which had changed with his varying emotions during the khan's speech, grew pale with consternation and dismay at this conclusion.

"Oh! by your soul, khan!" exclaimed he, "what dreadful words are these — I am dead! my soul is gone! — For the love of Allah! — in the name of the blessed prophet, recall that cruel sentence, or let your tribe cut me to pieces at your feet. Let the time be as long, the probation as severe as you will — only let me hope! Take my blood — my life — everything I have! — My tribe will be your friends, your servants — but destroy not the only charm of life, the hope that alone supports me."

Touched with the young man's distress, the chief looked mildly on him for awhile, but his eye became more piercing, and his voice rose to an impressive pitch, as he again addressed him.

"Khan," said he, — "for God forbid I should withhold the title that is thy due, — let not a womanly and enervating passion subdue your nobler

nature. Think more of your own dignity. — Let the same consideration which shut my ears to your demands stimulate you to a like self-denial.—Let selfish feelings be forgotten. Remember only what is due to your family, and think what we owe ourselves. Think you that those among us, whose sons or whose brothers may have fallen by your sword, could consent to receive you as their kinsman ? Think you that I myself, with the fate of my own father fresh in my remembrance — with the sightless face of my uncle ever before my eyes — can forget the authors of these outrages. Could you yourself, with the blood of a father still crying from the earth, join hands in marriage with a daughter of those who slew him ? — Thy heart as a son would revolt at the sacrilege. Thy pride, as a chief, would spurn at the concession. Thy justice, as protector of thy tribe, would repel the thought. It is manifest, it cannot be. — Then if we cannot be friends with honour, let us be brave and worthy foes.—Thou hast still the advantage over me, for I remain thy debtor, although it will be my study to discharge the debt as speedily as may be. In the mean time, remain our honoured guest, until it suit thee to return to thy home and tribe."

The young man's colour mounted high as the khan spoke ; but, ere he had concluded, it faded away, and he remained for some time as one confounded or perplexed. A struggle was within him, and his breast heaved convulsively like the waves of an agitated sea. At length he broke silence, and once more drawing up his tall form as one who has taken his resolution, he said —

" It is well — we have understood. The sayings of the khan are not to be questioned ; — there is no more to be said. Yet our holy prophet hath taught, that ' blessed are the healers of feuds and

those who deal in mercy — they are the physicians of the Most High!' The unfortunate before thee, who is less than the least, will lift his voice no more in thy presence. There was a time when he might have made his own terms; — but it is past, and, though he may suffer, he cannot repent of his conduct. For the khan's proffered hospitality he is grateful, but he cannot accept it. He will quit this place at once, as he entered it, with his horse and his arms alone — he requires neither guide nor guard. The khan has been pleased to confess a debt of gratitude, yet denies the only recompense that has been craved: that is also well — but we stoop to no lesser boon; — the debt is cancelled, and the khan is free. God is omnipotent! — under the shadow of his arm thy servant goes forth. The counsels of men change with their fortunes, but the decrees of destiny are immutable. When the wretch who now takes his leave shall again stand in the presence, it may be that the khan will not reject his petition." Having uttered these words in a firm yet respectful tone, the young man, placing his hand upon his breast and bowing profoundly, quitted the presence.

"Nay, nay — stay, khan," exclaimed the chief, hastily, half rising from his seat, in evident agitation. "By the soul of my father, I mean not —" but the youth was already gone, and recovering and reseating himself, he checked those who had sprung forward to recall him. "It matters not," said he: then muttering in an undervoice, "Mashallah! mashallah! a noble fellow!" he relapsed into silence, and remained for some time absorbed, as it seemed, in reflection.

The movement which again agitated the assembly soon roused him from his mood; the feelings

which created it were of a varied character. Exclamations of applause and admiration, were once more mingled with sounds of execration and displeasure. "What a gallant youth!" said one — "how brave, how handsome! so like my own Hoossein! — how he stood in the presence like Isfundear before the wicked Urjasp!" "May curses be poured upon his head!" growled another; "may his father's tomb be polluted, and dishonour fall upon his mother! — whose dog is he, that he should steal like a thief among those whose sons or brothers he has murdered, and who thirst to drink his blood? — *He* carry off the young khanum! — disgrace be on his name!"

Nor was the conduct of their chief less a subject of various and conflicting opinion. "Barikillah! there's a chief for you!" said one, exalting his voice, that the flattery might not be lost: "listen to his words! — how admirable, how just! what wisdom!" "Aye," echoed another, "may his shadow never diminish! — it is under such a chief that the tribe flourishes — ah! justice and honour are his peculiar property — no fear of his friends suffering wrong, when even his enemies must be astounded at his generosity! May his house be eternally prosperous!" "May the curse of Sheitaun light on such generosity!" muttered another; "generosity to wolves and tigers! — what good turn do these unsainted Koords deserve at our hands, that having caught a chief of them — the curse of Allee on him! — we should let him out of the trap with our own hands, and never lift a sword to give him a parting blow?" "Aye, wisdom, indeed," said a second, "contempt upon such wisdom! — we shall all know its value the next breach we have with the Koords, and this lion-killer's sword at the head of them!" "The

khan may talk as he pleases of justice and honour," growled a third harsh voice, "when he has replaced my herds and rebuilt my ruined house; — when the blood that was shed upon my threshold has been paid at the rate of a maun for a miscall by the ghorumsaugs, and when many a Koordish mother weeps for her daughter taken to replace that of Kara Yussuf — oaths and sanctuary! what are these when the harem and the mosque are prophaned? — what protection should they afford to a dog that comes here to use his pleasure with our beards, and make asses of our fathers? — but mark the end of it!"

"Sirafrauz Khan," said his uncle, Zulfecar, in tones of ill-disguised rage and disappointment, "thy intentions may be praiseworthy, but thou hast acted this day like the traveller who found a tiger's cub half-drowned in a pool, and took it out and carried it to its mother's den; — know ye what the beast did? — 'Villain, what hast thou to do with my offspring?' said the tigress, and flew upon him and tore him to pieces, and fed her cub with part of its deliverer's flesh. Even such will be the return for thy ill-judged kindness to one of an evil and treacherous race. — Heard ye the parting words of the haramzadeh?"

"Aye, uncle," replied the khan; "but I know how he hath already dealt with us — I can tell how he acted with my child, when she was in his power — how he hath fought upon our side, when treachery might have been ruin: but had it even been otherwise, rememberest thou not what our holy prophet hath said? — 'Blessed are the just, even he who shall deal uprightly with his enemy!' On my head be the consequences, if they be evil; nor let the parting words of a man whose heart was burning be remembered to his prejudice. When

the feet are in the felek, who minds what the tongue may utter? The youth was rejected as a friend — he left us as a courteous enemy — he will meet us as a brave and resolute one; and who is there among us that will dread the meeting? Are the Beyauts to quail before the Koords, because one brave man more is added to their number? — may God avert it! No — with our trust in Allah, and the justice of our dealing, let us go forth to meet them. And now, why tarry we longer? — the business which called us together presses. Let the moonujoom declare the fortunate moment, and then, Bismillah! let the foot of courage be placed in the stirrup of resolution — let our young men mount, and, guiding the courser of impetuosity by the rein of discretion, let us set forth on our projected enterprise."

"Belli! belli! barikillah! bismillah! bismillah! inchallah mubarik bashud!" echoed from the whole assembly, and there was a general move. "Every officer to his charge," said the khan, with a loud voice, as he rose to his feet—"let the reish suffeeds and zabuts repair to their respective ooolooses and villages, and let a vigilant watch be every where maintained until our return."

In another moment, the whole fortress and village rung with the sounds, and displayed the bustle, of departure; the gholaums hurried out to mount their horses; the other troops formed under their respective leaders; the clamour of women and children; the uttering of blessings and farewells, of lamentations and cheers, and all the various feelings which agitate the heart at such a moment, arose for a while, but subsided as the whole party, falling into the order of march, descended to the plain below. Here there was a halt, to ascertain the lucky moment, and some

embarrassment was occasioned by the astrologer's declaration that it was already past; but it was fortunately recollected, that just at the critical period, some yeduks of the khan had broken ground, and been led by the jeloodar on some affair of his own to the maidaun below the fort, and this was held good as a commencement, while, on the other hand, the most experienced of the party deemed it highly inauspicious to turn back. The general feeling, as usual in similar cases, turned the scale; the greater number, burning with hopes of prisoners and plunder, were eager to set forth, and the few timid or cautious voices raised in faint opposition were overwhelmed, or unattended to — but the facts were afterwards remembered.

The party halted for some minutes on the level ground beyond the village: there each man, for the last time, inspected the harness of his steed, drew girths and girdle tight, examined his arms, and cast a careful glance over his whole equipment. As they stood prepared, a small but gallantly armed group rode down to join them — it was their leader, with a few of his principal attendants and officers, who, returning the cordial greeting of his men, placed himself instantly at their head, and the whole troop moved steadily down the valley.

There was one who viewed this spectacle with feelings very different from those which animated the armed cavalcade. The discharged gholaum — the disappointed lover — the rejected friend — Reza Koolee Khan, in short, had retired from the presence of his late master, and from the view of his former companions, many of whom, in spite of altered circumstances, greeted him with a hearty "khodah-hafiz!" to a secluded corner of the valley, where, picketing his horse, he strode up the

hill, almost at random, to reflect upon the rapid and confounding change which had occurred in his hopes and prospects, and give free scope to his thick-coming thoughts. The heart of a lover may, perhaps, divine the impulse which led his steps to a spot which overlooked the fortress, and enabled him, though from a distance, to observe what passed within its walls.

"So, then, the dream is out—the game is lost!" muttered he. "My sanguine anticipations are gone! Is hope, then, at an end?—because I have lost one chance, are we to abandon the prize in despair? May Allah forbid! Abandon Leilah! Better abandon life! for what were life without her? But what, then, is to be done?—how even to see her? Ah! what will be her pain when these news reach her? After all, something must be determined on. Could I but see old Atougha! —assuredly, means may be found—but her father —I cannot curse him. No; generous and noble as he is, not willingly has he dealt me this heavy blow?—and, by the holy prophet! said he not truth? We Beyauts choose not mates from hostile nests—we wed not with the daughters of those whose hands reek with our fathers' blood! And yet, is there not a power stronger than natural ties, and louder than the voice of blood?—more arbitrary than the mandates of princes? What are oaths, and vows, and deadly feuds to the all-constraining force of love? Love!—is it not, in truth, the voice of the Almighty in our hearts?—the soul of life?—the animating essence of all nature? And shall I then dare to gainsay its commands, or shrink like a coward from its impulses? May Allah himself forbid! I have sworn it, by the honour of my father, and by my own soul—let Koord or Beyaut do what they will, Leilah

shall be mine! Fool that I was, to abandon the advantage I once possessed — and yet not so — I have preserved my honour; and even Sirafrauz Khan, rigid and inexorable as he is, has been compelled to bear witness to my integrity.

"Ah! there they go!" continued he, as, while he thus mused, the long, armed cavalcade descended from the fort — "and there too should Reza Koolee have been, but for that meddling mongrel Toorkoman — may curses seize his soul — each day — each enterprize should have heaped service upon service, until the khan himself had been won to my wishes. But it is past — it was wild — it was folly — we must now use other means — ah! well does it suit a wretched outcast like me — without either family or home — with little more than his horse and his sword — to speak of winning the daughter of a powerful chief: but, won she shall be, or the head of Reza Koolee shall be laid low as the dust he treads on! — Be of comfort, oh my soul — shine out, thou star of my fate — direct my path, and, inchallah, the end shall yet be propitious." Having thought or uttered something such as we have here recorded — and having watched the cavalcade out of sight, he descended the mountain; and, mounting his horse, took his way from the Kallah Feerozeh and its environs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT.

When the khan quitted his daughter in the underoon, as has been related, the condition of Leilah was abundantly wretched. The dubious expressions of her father, as he left her, were ill calculated to afford her comfort; and the poor girl was left, perhaps designedly, uncertain as to the fate of her lover. Even the gleams of hope which made their way into her soul, and shewed him safe from the anger of her father, and the fury of her kinsmen, were obscured by the chilly thought, that she should never see him more; for, though she would cheerfully have given her life for his, to live without him, to abandon him for ever, was a misery she could not calmly contemplate; and, in the desolation of a young, and ardent, and affectionate heart, deprived of its first object of devotion, she threw herself into the arms of her old nurse, and abandoned herself to silent, but bitter and unrestrained tears.

The grief of old Atougha was more clamorous — "Ai wahi! ai wahi!" exclaimed she, wringing her hands, "take heart, dearest child — my life — my soul — do not kill me! what kind of grief is this?

it will destroy thee, dearest! and for what, after all? Think you they will harm him? not they, indeed — could the khan hurt a hair of the head of thy preserver, child? — La illah-il-ullah! he dare not — and why should you not see him again? you will meet, and that soon, be assured — believe your old nurse, my pearl — but kill her not thus with that vehement grief!"

"Ah, nurse!" said the miserable Leilah — "thy words are but flattery or folly — you know they are so — for me there is no comfort — I never, never shall see his face again — oh! could I but know that he was safe, that they will spare his precious life, I should then be happy!" But the passionate flood of grief, that choaked her words, contradicted their import, and despair seemed utterly to overwhelm her, as she sobbed, "Oh! no — no — no — it is all over; we shall never meet more!"

"The folly is with thyself, my child — I speak the words of truth and reason — I tell thee the youth is safe. — Thinkest thou, had their designs been deadly, that they would not have been executed ere now? yet still the assembly sits, and thy lover lives. And, thinkest thou so poorly of him, that he will ever give up the hope he has so long cherished? Ah! little knowest thou of a lover's daring — thou wilt learn more ere the game is played out. — Trust me, before the youth have left the presence, as, inchallah! he shall do safe in life and limb, he will have planned the means of meeting; neither rest nor sleep will he know till he sees thee, and repeats his vows of love and constancy at thy feet. He, who would have given his life to release thee from the plunderers of the desert, will never abandon the chosen of his heart

at the first rough blast of adverse fortune — never — never!"

"Ah, dearest nana! may Allah bless thee for thy comfort! would to heaven I could feel it in my heart, for truly I need it sorely. Oh! that I knew the end of this fearful meeting! these fierce men, and that stern old Zulfecar! Oh! may Allah give my father firmness to resist their deep and deadly hatred — may justice and mercy prevail over the counsels of these blood-thirsty men."

"Allah! Allah! my child, my soul! thou wilt kill me! Let me go — I will learn the truth; and, inchallah! thou shalt have happy tidings. Cheer up, my child — wipe thy eyes, arrange thy dress — let not the women observe thy disorder — what would they think? why give the harem gossips room to talk? And the banou — may her house prosper! thou knowest her precise ways — with all her quiet indifference, if she guessed the truth, thy life would become miserable — so be cautious, my soul, and prepare the *mujdeh* for my tidings."

Having thus bestowed her comfort and her counsel, the old woman left her charge, and repaired to one of the galleries of the devan-khaneh, where, unseen herself, she witnessed the scenes we have described, with an interest not exceeded by that of the actors; and she returned to reassure the sinking heart of Leilah, who, in spite of all her new-born prudence, and the budding hopes which the words of her nurse had awakened, could scarcely restrain the expression of her anxiety and distress. The assurance of her lover's safety afforded the only comfort of which she was susceptible; yet, the reasonings of old Atougha were not without effect, when she sought to persuade her

darling child, that her present sorrow was but as a passing cloud upon the fair heaven of her happiness, which the sunshine of her lover's countenance would speedily dispel. "For the rest," added she, in the customary phrase of her country, "Khodah bugoorg-ust! God is great!"

"But, after all, dear nurse, how can we ever meet?" said Leilah, whose maiden timidity yielded to the intensity of her feelings, and the urgency of the occasion. "He must quit the country, doubtless — and for me — what can I do?"

"My child, trust to me," replied the nurse — "at this moment suspicion may be awake, and to stir in such a matter might be dangerous — yet who can tell? In the meantime, dry thine eyes, and take comfort — what wouldst thou say to take the air to day — to visit the durgah? In an hour's time thy father and his people will have left the valley — the lounging idlers will have withdrawn, and the fort will be quiet. The country is safe, and it will soothe thy mind to say thy prayers at the holy Imaumzadeh!"

The maiden started — "Ah! that durgah! there was a time indeed," said she, with a melancholy sigh — "a happy, happy time! but it is past — never, never again!"

"And why wilt thou say so, my daughter — why despond thus? has thy old nana ever deceived thee, that thou wilt not believe her now? But, happen what may to-day, thou wilt see the old moollah — he is a man of knowledge and of prudence, and he loves thee, child. He can tell the hidden things of time, and his advice may avail us much."

"Ah, nana, you are right — you have said it — the old moollah, indeed, may aid us — Bismillah! I am ready — let us prepare for the durgah!"

The khan, when he quitted the fortress, having been too much occupied by affairs of consequence to think of what might be passing in his underoon, and consequently having imposed no restrictions upon the actions of his daughter, Leilah and her nurse found no difficulty in obtaining permission to visit the Kudum-Moobarik. Her morning's indisposition, instead of proving an obstacle, formed the ground of her request; and the precise, but simple-minded banou, acquiesced with readiness in the idea that the health of the maiden might be benefited as much by her devotions at the shrine, as by the advice of the old moollah who officiated there.

The simplicity of manners which prevailed in the rude country of which we speak, particularly among the tribes, and which extended even to the families of chiefs, dispensed, to a great degree, with the mystery and state which regulates the harems of the great in cities or more civilized parts of Persia. Leilah and her nurse quitted the Kallah Feerozeh with only one male and one female attendant, the latter being the slave Noor bukhsh, of whom mention has been already made; and even these accompanied them no further than the outskirts of the village, while their mistress and the nana repaired alone to the Imaumzadeh.

No one was to be seen as they entered the inclosure, but voices within the tomb gave proof that the place was occupied, and the already trembling Leilah shrunk in terror at the thought of observation. Alas! she already tasted the misery of conscious guilt — of a secret unauthorized intercourse — of slighting parental authority and deceiving a parent. On the present occasion her alarm was not of long continuance, for, at the sound of their approaching footsteps, the figure of the old moollah was seen issuing from the shrine.

"Punah-be-khodah!" exclaimed the old man, starting, "my messenger must have had wings: and thou too, my daughter, thy feet have not lingered on the way!"

"Ahi! what words are these, man?" demanded the nurse, not less astonished: "what messenger dost thou speak of — we have seen none?"

"No messenger? — then in the name of Allah how happen ye to have come hither, daughter?"

"And why should we not come to the blessed durgah, thou man of nought? is it not open to the prayers of the faithful? — but come, tell us thy news, if any thou hast; — if good, the *mujdeh* is ready."

"Be chushm!" replied the moollah; "upon my eyes be it: ye have come, my daughters, in a fortunate hour — but do thou, nana, proceed with thy charge to the spot which thou knowest. I will speedily join thee there. In the meantime, there are some here whose affairs require dispatch — they will not long detain me — bismillah!"

With trembling limbs, and a heart throbbing with hope and apprehension, Leilah followed her nurse to the well-known spot. Once it had been a garden, and still, along the half-obliterated watercourses and long canal, rose-bushes and other flowering shrubs pushed through the choaking weeds with a tenacity of life that merited a better fate. In the centre stood the ruins of what had been a pleasure-house, where the lord of the garden used once to seat himself and enjoy the cool air and murmur of the waters. This was the spot where Reza Koolee usually met with Leilah, to sit and talk of love — where she, with downcast eye and half-averted cheek, would listen to his vows and hopes of bliss. These were happy

hours! Alas! under what different feelings did she now visit it! She was glad to rest her agitated frame upon a fragment of the ruins, and her heart sunk as she thought these hours would never return.

So deeply was she engrossed with these painful reflections, that she heeded not a light approaching footstep, nor the rustling of the withered herbage, louder than that which might be caused by the slight north wind, or the quick run of the lizard; nor was it until her garment was slightly touched, that the maiden started to her feet, uttered a half-suppressed shriek, and turned as if to fly: a gentle grasp restrained her, and, terror-struck, she looked around — it was her lover himself! It was his own speaking eye, with its mild and earnest gaze, that solicited, implored her to stay. What could she do? —what could she think? Terror, anguish, anxiety, doubt, all fled away, and pure, unalloyed delight absorbed her soul. It was her lover, safe and unharmed — true and devoted as ever: she saw him, heard him, drank in his eager accents, felt but his presence — that he she never hoped again to look upon was alive, and in her arms.

It was long ere the passionate burst of feeling and surprise which overwhelmed the sensitive Leilah subsided sufficiently to admit of words. Her spirits, overwrought by the agitating events of the morning, were unequal to support so unexpected an excess of joy; and for a while, she could only sob, and clasp her lover in silence to her heart, unheeding of all beside. It was not until the tumult in her breast had begun to subside, and her mind became alive to his eager expressions, that a sense of her situation rushed upon her soul, and, deeply blushing, she withdrew her arms, and shrunk from his embrace. It was then, too, that

Reza Koolee awoke from the delirious trance of bliss into which he had been plunged by the unguarded proofs of affection lavished on him for the first time by his mistress. Alarmed at her sudden shrinking, he sought to retain her in his grasp, with a flood of passionate remonstrances; but, once roused to recollection, the maiden pride and native modesty of Leilah were not again to be surprised.

"Ah, Reza Koolee!" she said, as she strove to adjust the slight veil, which, on her arrival at the shrine, she had removed—"this is wrong—we are much to blame. Thou knowest how wrong it is—and, merciful Allah! what may be the consequences! Thy life—"

"My life!" exclaimed the youth—"and is it for me thou fearest, Leilah? Oh! if it be for this unworthy head alone, my life were but a poor price for those testimonies of pure affection that have entranced my very soul—how willingly would I risk it to enjoy the dear delight. But dread nothing for me, dear Leilah! I am *thy* slave, but thine alone—ready to die for thee, but only at thy command! Leilah! the star of Reza Koolee is high in the firmament—it heeds not the malice of his foes."

"Ah, friend!" said the still trembling Leilah—"what words are these? Dost thou forget that but some hours are past since thy life was in jeopardy from my fierce kindred? Oh, God! did I not hear the very cry of their wrath, and the clash of their swords, as they pressed forwards to dip their hands in thy blood?—doth not the hideous sound yet ring in my ears? Is not every branch of the house of Karagoorloo bitter in the mouth of my father's family?—and yet here, in the very midst of their lands—surrounded by the tents of

his tribe, and with thy hand on his daughter's robe — sayest thou, I am safe!"

"Nay, by your own soul, light of my eyes!" exclaimed Reza Koolee, "but it is so. Knowest thou not that thy noble father hath sworn that the life of him who eat of his salt, and served him with his sword, shall be safe from all violence at the hands of his tribe? But fear not, my own Leilah: were it otherwise, the period of danger is short — the hour has arrived, and Gholaum Allee Sheer departs."

"Ah! did I not feel this? — said I not so?" gasped the maiden. "It is true, then — we part, Reza Koolee — this meeting is our last — I knew it well:" and, trembling, overpowered with her emotions, she once more sunk into the arms of her lover.

"Sweetest Leilah!" said the youth, after long indulging in the delicious feeling of pressing her to his breast, and exerting himself to sooth her bitter grief — "be not thus utterly cast down. Dear as these tears are to my soul, it breaks my heart to see thee thus: cheer up, light of my eyes! — I swear, by your life, and by your own soul, we shall meet again, and that full soon. They have rejected me, Leilah — the assembled tribe of Beyaut has thrust me forth, and defied me. Your noble father himself — may his prosperity increase! — while he acknowledged my services, saw fit to remind me that Koord and Beyaut could never match together — that the blood upon our hands cried out from the ground to forbid so inauspicious a union! Leilah! I am a chief — I love the high sentiments of a brave and generous soul — I cherish my tribe — I respect even their prejudices; — but were the ghosts of every Koord that has fallen by the hand of a Beyaut to rise up in array against

me, I would tell them, that the honour of their tribe could never be injured by the union of their chief with a noble and a virtuous girl—aye, though they were backed by all the oolemah of Iraun! I quit Kallah Feerozeh—I have left your father's service—I leave thee, too, my Leilah!—but I have sworn by myself to return, and so to return that thy father himself shall no longer refuse me thy hand; and the Omnipotent Creator who loves justice and upholds those who fear and serve him, will grant my prayers, and enable me to fulfil my vow!"

Gazing through her tears on the animated countenance of her lover, Leilah for a moment forgot her own terrors, and shared his enthusiasm. Her slender form still hung upon his breast, and her lips had already parted to reply, when the tramp of a horse was heard rapidly approaching; and in a moment after, the voice of the old moollah rose high in remonstrance with the rider.

"I tell thee, old man, the matter is of life or death!" exclaimed a voice of peculiar sweetness: "see him I must; thou art no friend of his, if thou seekest to hinder me: here he assuredly is—delay me, at thy peril!"

The start of Reza Koolee, at the sound of those accents, seemed rather that of astonishment than alarm; for, though his eye was turned with eager gaze to the entrance, his hand griped neither to sword nor dagger, and he still clasped the fragile form, which, sinking from his embrace, awaited the intrusion in dismay. Suspense was of short duration, for, in another moment, a figure enveloped in a horseman's cloak and rough fur cap, whose face was muffled in a shawl, rushed into the inclosure and advanced with rapid step towards the lovers, followed by the old moollah.

"Almighty God! Guleyaz!" burst from the lips of Reza Koolee, as he gazed at the intruder.

"Aye, brother, it is she — Guleyaz herself, who, distracted with terror and anxiety on thy account, and, without a messenger to trust to, has come in person to warn thee of thy danger — thy enemies prevail, and weave their toils around us while thou art dallying here."

"Done like my sister! — a step worthy of a high-minded Koordish lady — but what are thy tidings? Thy last warning was well-timed — it may have saved thy brother; — what new danger threatens?"

"Brother, the tidings I have to tell are not for the ear of a stranger — we must be alone!" and the maiden cast a reproachful glance at the female form which still clung in amazement and fear around the Koordish chief.

"Sister," replied he, "in this fair creature behold the light of thy brother's eyes — the *kiblch* of his soul — this is Leilah, the daughter of Sirafrauz Khan — what need I say more?"

"Allah kereem! Leilah!"

"Yes, Guleyaz — Leilah — that Leilah, so often the theme of thy brother's discourse — she for whom he has risked so much — for whom he is ready to sacrifice his life — whom thou, Guleyaz, hast promised to cherish for his sake, and whom thou wilt soon learn to love for her own."

"But alone with thee, and thus — at such a moment too!"

"Aye, sister, alone, yet protected by her innocence — By chance — a fortunate chance, we met where often we have met before, to part for a season. There remained but to exchange adieus when you appeared — until heaven might grant us a meeting under happier auspices."

"Daughter of my father's foe," said Guleyaz, "beloved of my beloved brother, receive a sister's embrace; may thy star be propitious; may Allah grant thee a favourable issue out of all thy troubles! — that which is dear to Reza Koolee must ever be precious to Guleyaz!" — and the gentle Leilah was enfolded in the affectionate embrace of the noble and not less beautiful, but more heroic Koordish maiden.

"In the name of the most merciful Creator, continue thus ever united, ye who are the life and soul of Reza Koolee — may heaven grant a happy result to this meeting! And now, Guleyaz, delay thy tidings no longer — they must decide my course."

"Alas, brother, God grant thee a fortunate decision, for my tidings are of evil. Mianabad is no longer open to thee — to the dwelling of thy fathers there is no return; and, unless thy hand be strong enough to expel the usurper, thy home must henceforth be with strangers!"

"Then let the usurper tremble!" replied Reza Koolee, fiercely; "for sure as the sun is in the heavens his hour will come — but what has occurred to increase the evil already so great?"

"Much, brother — the tiger is thoroughly roused, and chafes for blood. Thou knowest of the ill-omened intercourse which has been opened between our uncle and the chief of Semulghan — this ripens every day into a stricter alliance, through the influence of the nefarious Goorg Allee Beg, his vakeel, who is for ever at the ark. Thou knowest his hatred of thee, and thou wilt not wonder at his desire to injure thee. Till of late he had little in his power. Thy absence was known, but neither its cause nor thy place of concealment. By what means Goorg Allee did at length discover

thy residence at Kallah Feerozeh, neither Meerza Seleem nor myself can guess — but he has made signal use of it to thy loss.

"Thou knowest well that whatever of forbearance our family has experienced from thy uncle is due less to generosity than prudence — less to goodwill than to fear. In truth how could any charge be sustained against persons of so blameless a life. But the fact of thy residence in the stronghold of a hereditary enemy afforded them the handle they required. The insidious Goorg Allee represented the object of thy residence at Kallah Feerozeh to be that of intriguing with Sirafrauz Khan against your uncle: that, backed by his troops, the discontented Koords of Baum and Isferaeen were to rise and invest Mianabad, and that the slaughter of the whole family, and plunder of all who resisted, was to be the price of such assistance.

"The poison failed not to operate; and Nujjuff Allee, convinced that a conspiracy was on foot, began to exercise a system of severity and extortion, intended, doubtless, to entrap suspected persons into seditious murmuring, or force them into open revolt. His injustice bore hard on some of the principal families of the town, and alarm and disgust prevails there. It was through a slave of the underoon that I became aware of the mission of Goorg Allee to Kallah Feerozeh, and the danger which threatened you. I thank heaven, the only sort of warning I could transmit was in so far of use; but, so jealous is the khan, and so numerous are the spies he has set upon your movements, that a return to Mianabad would be madness. Of this Meerza Seleem is aware, but he is not less jealously watched, and any attempt on his part to communicate with you might prove fatal to both.

"What was to be done? Of those who are devoted to you, your sister alone remained free to act — and not one moment, brother, did she hesitate. Happily, accustomed to emergencies, inured to fatigue, and not unqualified in mind for such an enterprize, all I required was a horse and arms. These were readily procured by one to whom no suspicion as yet attached. The condition of the town, into which a number of Toorkomans and stranger Koords had been admitted, rendered the dress I now wear less liable to remark. My horse was purchased by Meerza Seleem's darogha, from an *ooloos* of Toorkomans encamped without the walls, where it remained, until, in the dusk of yester-even, I mounted it. The light of the waning moon enabled me to trace a route, of which little beyond the general direction could be known to me. Often did I stray from the path over devious wilds and rocky wildernesses; and often did I pray to Allah for the aid which I dared not ask from man. Once I was pursued — I know not by whom — by the blessing of God I misled my pursuers, who lost my traces in the bed of a stream. The hope of saving thee, Reza Koolee, bore me up under all; and the arm of the Most High directed me so, that this morning found me descending the hills into the head of this valley. A fursung from hence, I was met by the fakeer to whom I had entrusted my former message. From him did I learn the events of this morning, and by him was directed to this spot, where I was assured that from the good moollah I should have sure tidings of thee. This is what I have to tell thee, brother; and now it lies with thee to decide upon the path thou wilt pursue, for that which leads to Mianabad is closed against thee."

"Praise be to Allah!" exclaimed the young

man, embracing the maiden — "thou art indeed my sister — a true and worthy daughter of our father's house! Alas, beloved Guleyaz, dearly hast thou purchased the melancholy right to share the toils and fortunes of thy brother. Where, indeed, can he now go? His home must be the caves of the mountains, and the hollows of the valleys. But thou hast ridden far, Guleyaz, and must require rest: when thou art recruited we shall, at least, quit this place, and heaven will direct our steps."

"No, brother — no rest nor sleep for me, till thou art out of danger. Thinkest thou not, when they hear at Mianabad how Goorg Allee has been baffled, and how thou hast escaped, that the messengers of death will be sent upon thy traces? Oh! let no time be lost — no cause be given for self-reproach: work is for to-day, rest for to-morrow — behold, I am ready — my horse has been fed this morning, and will carry me well to the mountains; there, in some safe recess, we may devise a course for the future."

"Barikillah! my brave sister — Oh! that there were but twenty men like thee in Mianabad, and Reza Koolee would not need to wander far nor long. Bismillah! embrace this loved one, and then we depart."

The maidens embraced — the slender form of Leilah was once more folded to the breast of the intrepid Guleyaz — "May God protect thee, fair but fragile flower!" said she; "ill art thou suited, my sister, for these bustling scenes of peril, which demand the presence of thy lover — yet, inchallah! ye may meet again in happier times, when the rose of thy beauty, and the perfume of thy affection, shall repay him for past misfortunes; and the dangers he has braved for thy sake shall no more be

remembered." So saying, she kissed the pale forehead of Leilah, and placed her, half fainting, in her lover's arms.

The Koordish chief gazed long upon her pallid and drooping form. "Farewell, Leilah! farewell, dearest!" said he, imprinting a long, fervent kiss upon her trembling lips — "by this kiss thou art mine, and mine thou shalt for ever remain! Fear nothing — thy lover will return and claim thee, were every Beyaut in Khorasan to oppose him! Good nurse, receive her — be faithful as thou hast hitherto been, and thy reward shall be sure."

With one earnest gaze on the beloved form, Reza Koolee bounded forwards and joined his sister, who was already quitting the inclosure. The moollah, with the discretion of his calling, when he saw that all was right, had taken post outside to prevent surprise; but, at the young man's signal, he made his appearance, took the way with them to the cave of the *Kudum-moobarik*.

The sun had disappeared from the heavens, ere, in a dell near the summit of the mountains that intervene between Kallah Feerozeh and Mianabad, the brother and the sister drew the reins of their wearied horses, and dismounted to take a few hours' repose. Some cakes of barley bread, with grape jelly, and the clear water of a little rill, was all the food they had: the soft verdure of early spring afforded grateful, though somewhat scanty sustenance to the wearied horses; and, having secured them, so that they could not wander far, the Koordish chief and his sister having first performed their devotions, wrapped themselves up in their cloaks, and resigned themselves in confidence to rest.

Accustomed to such hurried snatches of sleep, there was little risk of Reza Koolee indulging too

long; but scarcely had the night run half its course, ere an instinctive sense of danger made him spring to his feet, and he started, at finding by his side an armed man, who seemed watching his repose. His first impulse was to draw his sword, and cast an anxious glance towards the spot where his sister had laid herself to sleep. There lay she still, in peaceful undisturbed slumber. More fatigued than her robust brother, her sleep was more profound, nor, as it seemed, had the intruder disturbed it. The inference was, clearly, that he could not be an enemy. Reassured on this point, he turned to accost the stranger, who advanced with the salutation of peace.

"Praise to Allah," said he, "the face of your servant is whitened this day; my fortune is great that I have found you, khan! — Behold the token of your servant, Meerza Seleem, who has sent me in quest of thee."

The young man took the token, and knew the signet of the meerza. "It is right, friend," said he, "we recognise the meerza's seal — where is thy master, and what are thy tidings."

"I beg to state that the meerza has quitted Mianabad, and, like others, is forced to fly for his life. — The day of judgment has reached the town — the lady's flight is known — the khan, wild with fury, is arresting and putting to death all those whom he suspects or fears. By this time the whole country, from Jahjerm to Sultaun Meydaun, is swarming with gholaums and Toorkomans, who thirst for the reward that is attached to thy head."

"Ill tidings, friend — they scarce can claim the *mujdeh*," replied the young man, smiling, — "but be faithful and steady, and thou shall not lack reward. What knowest thou further, and how must we proceed?"

"I beg to represent," said the man, "that the meerza, with such of his property and people as he could get together, set off last evening, with the hope of reaching the Yeilâk Ildooz, in Bansmuhuleh, where the Eeliauts are friendly; and he will wait your commands in the meadow at the Keerbulagh."

"But by what way can we reach it?— you say the Jahjermee paths are shut."

"By your head, khan, the thing is not easy — the northern passes of the Jaghetai will be all guarded, for the strength of the Beyauts is abroad, and there are few to watch their country — and as for the desert, — 'when the kuveer is without *kuzzâks*, then is spring without flowers'— After all we are not muleteers or merchants — what need we keep the paths? If it please the khan, let us cross the sahrah to the west of Muzzeenoon;—the moon is rising, and we may reach the skirts of Koh-e-Jaghetai before the morning breaks."

"Well said — the desert is wide — but yet we know its paths. And lie in one of the hollows till evening -- hah? — it is well — they will scarcely seek us there — and if they do?"—

"Whose dogs are they to find us?" said the man with energy.

"Good, let it be so — bismillah! — let us proceed."

Gently awakening his still sleeping sister, Reza Koolee acquainted her with what had occurred, and explained the course he thought it most expedient to adopt: in a few minutes after, the whole three were in their saddles, and making rapid progress down the northern slope, towards the desert.

Morning was yet faint in the east, when they overlooked the desolate tract which intervenes between Muzzeenoon and Abbassabad. Black rocks

here and there rose like islands in a dim plain, part of which glimmered with a shallow covering of water, while part lay hid under that deceitful vapour which travellers well know as the Sahrâb or "water of the desert." Over this appeared a succession of many-coloured hillocks, beyond which towered an extensive blue mountainous mass, known in that country as the "Koh-e-Jag-hetai."

As the travellers descended, they skirted the eastern part of this desert plain, having, on their right hand, a low sloping bank, on which might be seen the ruins of both towns and villages, but after a progress of near an hour, they diverged to the left and struck across the plain, which soon became swampy and moist under their feet.

"What can these singular creatures be?" said Guleyaz, directing her brother's attention to a distant point on their right, where a number of curiously shaped black specks appeared, wading in the water of the sahrah.

"Creatures!" exclaimed her brother, as his more practised eye glanced over the objects — "where have our senses been? By the head of my father, they are men! — horsemen! — aye, by the kaabah, there they are in truth — eight — ten — twelve — aye, thirteen, of them — see — see, how they are reflected in the water — and their heads are turned this way."

"Reflected!" echoed the attendant — "let my lord look this way — can that be the reflection of those horsemen on our right? — behold, there are more of them."

"By heaven! you are right — but no — these are no horsemen, Stafferullah! there are camels and kajawahs. It is a cafilah from Mushed —

great will be their luck if they escape these hawks."

"Aye, brother, and small will be ours if we fall in with either of them — to us it were death, yet how to shun them in this wide sahrah!"

"There is no way now, my sister — we must hold our course and trust in God — what can we do? — our horses are spent and overwrought, while theirs, no doubt, are fresh and vigorous."

"Alas, it is so — yet still, our number is small, we are scarcely perceptible in this wide space — possibly we may escape observation."

"That hope is vain — see — we are seen already, they have accelerated their pace and approach;" and in fact, as he spoke, it was obvious that the horsemen on their right had closed and were riding briskly towards them."

"Well," continued Reza Koolee, who had cast an anxious glance around him; "if it be God's will, we may yet escape — move steadily forward, and press not our horses till forced to do so, we shall fare the better at the push."

On they rode accordingly, in anxious silence, while the others, doubtless mounted on fresher horses, gained visibly upon them, and, as the light increased, the flash of a spear-head or steel cap showed itself in the sparkling ray.

"This will never do, my brother!" said the maiden — "Why yield without a struggle — your horse, at all events, is least exhausted — you are the prize they aim at — make the best of your way, while we shall cover your retreat. We shall fare well enough — but thou, brother, I tremble to think of what might happen! — In the name of Allah, away!"

"Sister," replied the young man, calmly, I

thank thee; it is like thyself, generous and self-devoted, to propose this — but what were thy brother if he could comply? Fear not for me, never have these miscreants laid hands on Reza Koolee, and inchallah! they never shall. Yet not for life, nor all that hangs upon it, would thy brother abandon thee, Guleyaz; trust to me and take courage."

Again, they continued in silence; and their horses, as if conscious of the emergency, exerted themselves with renewed vigour. Yet, still did their pursuers gain upon them; and, aware of their advantage, pressed their own horses; so that the surface-water of the wet kuveer flashed and sparkled from their hoofs, in the beams of the rising sun, as they came thundering on scarcely a mile distant. At this time, the surface of the plain became perceptibly softer, and the fugitives were sensible of an increased degree of cold. The water rose to the horses' knees; and, as Guleyaz turned round towards her brother in apprehension, she discovered that the scene was changed. Instead of the wide-spreading sahrah with its distant hills, and the dreaded horsemen closing on them, she saw but a grey and dim expanse of mist, unmarked by any distinguishable object, confining their view even of the earth they trod on, to the circuit of a few yards. They were enveloped in the body of that hovering vapour, which forms the sahrâb, and which they had seen resting like a cloud upon the desert. Its density, as they advanced, increased to almost palpable obscurity, although its edges were so attenuated as to render their entrance into it almost imperceptible.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Guleyaz, in delighted astonishment; but an expressive gesture from her brother checked her voice; and he, at the same moment, altered their direction, to one which car-

ried them still deeper into the water. In another minute he halted —" Our best and only chance is utter stillness," whispered he — " the trampling of our horses would assuredly betray us if we moved, as that of theirs will certainly indicate their path to us — be silent, and listen."—A minute of intense anxiety succeeded, and every breath was held as the dull sound of horse tramps, broken and deadened by the splashing water, swelled upon their ears, as the dash and rattle of oars from a distant boat are borne through the fog which conceals it.

The sound approached — it came fearfully near — Reza Koolee caught the arm of his sister, and pointed to the left, where five gigantic figures were floating past in air, so dim, so grey, so visionary, that, but for the thundering clash, they might have been taken for midnight ghosts, fleeing from the scent of the morning air to their abodes of darkness. The upper parts of man and horse alone were visible — beneath, they melted into the heavy mist; and they swept by as they came, suddenly, like the shadow of a flitting cloud borne by a swift wind.

The fugitives breathed more freely as the threatened danger passed away; leaving them the assurance of having remained unseen. But it was not until the faintest echo of their foot-tramps had died on the damp air, that the party ventured to put themselves once more in motion. It was there, too, that all the practical experience of the young Koordish chief was required to extricate them from the dangerous ground, into which the pursuit had forced them. Much of their way was to be retraced, until the firm tread of their horses indicated that they had got clear of the unsound and marshy spots, and regained the hard surface of the kuveer. Still, enveloped in the

cloud, the protection of which they dreaded yet to leave, their course was in some degree uncertain. But their doubts were of no long duration, for a gentle breeze arose with the sun, and the vapours, drawn together, sailed away to the hills in their front, leaving the whole face of the sahrah unobscured to the view of the travellers.

On gazing around, to ascertain their position, and to discover that of their enemies, they saw that these had not failed of a booty, for they were at the very moment engaged in plundering the cafilah, which had been seen in the early morning; and which, deprived of one prey, they had pursued and easily overtaken. "So much for our good star," observed Reza Koolee —"let it but shine for one hour, and we may laugh at the rascals' beards." In truth, less than an hour did carry them across the remaining part of the open plain; and, buried from view in the endless intricacies of the tuppehs (or earthen hillocks) that skirt the Koh-e-Jaghetai, they felt themselves secure.

Evening had almost set in, before the travellers deemed it prudent to venture from their resting-place, or mount their horses, which, by that time, were somewhat recruited by rest, and the scanty food which the brink of a fresh-water fountain supplied. They then entered upon a difficult country, where the advantage of daylight, to direct their steps, would have been desirable; but the risks of darkness were less formidable, than those of meeting with the emissaries of Nujjuff Allee Khan; and, weary as they were, they plunged at once into the huge recesses of the Jaghetai mountains. For many an hour they toiled, ascending rocky faces, and diving into ravines, the sides and bottoms of which seemed formed of fragments from the mountain sides, jumbled in a confusion that

rendered their progress very painful. Often did the over-wrought horses stumble under their riders, who, themselves a prey to anxiety, roused them with bit and stirrup, and supported them as best they could, holding on their way in silence. Darkness and exhaustion, together with the dread of entirely knocking up their horses, forced the party to halt about midnight, in a valley of larger dimensions, which was the course of a copious stream. Gigantic buttresses of rock protruded in fantastic shapes from either side of the ravine; and the unusual forms of several trees were seen, relieved against the deep blue of the sky. Fresh herbage sprouted in abundance on the sides of the stream; and the hungry horses could scarce be withheld from the delicious bite, until the bits were taken from their mouths.

The cheer of the travellers was less sumptuous. Their bread and grape-jelly were finished, and the few crumbs that could be mustered were inadequate to restore vigour to their exhausted frames. Guleyaz, in particular, began to droop under the unwonted continuance of toil; and though her spirit and courage remained unimpaired, it was apparent that her bodily strength was unequal to such prolonged severity of exertion: and Reza Koolee, while he gathered together a few withered herbs for a bed, and wrapped her cloak around her person with greater care, could not refrain from regarding her with a pang of anxiety, which no personal danger could ever have excited. Still, the critical nature of their circumstances permitted not of long repose. A halt of three hours was all that could be granted to either man or beast; and somewhat refreshed, Guleyaz once more remounted her jaded horse.

Their way led up the valley to a steep gorge,

beyond which they hoped to enter on a less difficult and more friendly country; and they had pursued a rude track for more than two hours, and were rapidly rising towards the crest of the mountain, when, turning sharp round a bluff point of rock which projected into the stream, they came suddenly upon the embers of a fire, around which several men were stretched, as it seemed in sleep.

The murmur of the stream, as it foamed from rock to rock, had probably drowned the approaching sound of the travellers' foot tramps; but, no sooner had they rounded the point, and come in full view of the bivouac, than the only man who had not assumed a perfectly recumbent position, roused by the noise, started to his feet, opened his dim eyes, and roared, "Who goes there?" Unfortunately, the embers gave a light sufficient to cast a faint gleam upon the figures of the travellers, who, aware of their danger, were hurrying past; and the man believing, probably, that it was robbers attempting to steal their horses, vociferated, "Ahi! *doozd* — *doozd* — up, up, Allee Beg — up, Hoossein, the thieves are burning our fathers!" The alarm was death to the souls of the weary fugitives; but, trusting to their good star, they pressed on, in hopes of maintaining the start they had, and still escaping unperceived. Once more the stirrups were driven into the sides of the jaded horses — "Courage, dear Guleyaz," whispered he, eagerly, into his sister's ear — "Well done—strike the stumbling brute again — so, mashallah! let us but hold out for another half-hour, and we clear the cot'hul — now, sister — now or never!"

"Ah! now or never, brother—I am ready, but the poor beast will never reach that cot'hul — think what it has done already since I mounted it. Yet there is nothing else for it, and God is great!

But if it fall, brother, in the name of Allah! push thou on—add not to my misery by your danger—these rocks may conceal me—think of what hangs on your life, and hazard not all by neglecting your own safety."

"Think not of it, my sister,—you and I, or none. Were we to leave our horses, they would be found by our pursuers, and well would they know we could never quit the mountain. No—let us keep heart, and we may do well—the worst is over: remember this morning—who would have given an abbassee for our heads when those horsemen were at our heels?—yet here we are, safe as yet, and these sleepy-headed swine may think no more of us. By the sword of Allee! proper fellows are they for scouts!—let them evensleep on." But, alas! even while he yet spoke, faint voices were borne on the night breeze up the pass; and the approaching hoof-tramps of the horses left them no doubt that they were pursued.

"Oh, God! we are lost!" uttered Guleyaz; and even Reza Koolee compressed his lips with the stern resolution of despair, when he heard the unwelcome but sure tokens behind them. "On yet—on yet, my sister—for heaven's sake on!" and the eager maiden plied both stirrup and bow—for so was she armed—to urge on the weary brute; but the road was rough, and the horse stumbled and fell.

"Stafferullah! it's all over!" exclaimed Reza Koolee; "but, come—raise it—up with the beast once more—give me the rein—my hand is firmer, sister—trust to me—think only of yourself:" and, seizing the bridle close to the mouth, by main force of arm he lifted up the worn-out horse, and, half-supporting, half-dragging it, forced it to clamber up the steep and rocky road. Still their pursuers

gained on them: their words were now distinguishable, as they swore at the thieves, who they imagined had disturbed them, and encouraged each other to increased speed.

The crisis drew near. The last steep pull lay before the travellers, high and dark like a precipice with a cleft in its crest; and hopelessly, almost, did they regard the formidable height, while they mercilessly drove their jaded horses right up its almost perpendicular bosom. Within a few yards of its summit, they came completely to a stand-still, and at the same moment their pursuers reached the bottom, full in their view.

"Dismount! — dismount, Jaffer!" said he to the attendant — "drag up the brute!" While springing from his own, he gave it a blow, which sent the lightened animal right up the cleft; then, seizing that of his sister by the bridle, with irresistible force he bore it, as it were, up the remaining height, when, utterly exhausted, the animal staggered forward a step, and sunk with its rider to the ground.

Quick as lightning, Reza Koolee extricated his sister from the fallen beast, and, calling on Jaffer to raise it and attend to her, he, with equal rapidity, unslung his carbine, prepared the lock and priming, and took post in the jaws of the pass. It was well suited to his purpose; and his quick eye in a moment detected his advantage and sole remaining hope. Four horsemen were bounding up the pass below him, followed by two others at a greater distance. All was still above, as they approached with shout and hollow, and obviously without a dread of opposition. Concealed behind a rock, which formed one side of the very crest of the pass, Reza Koolee watched their progress — the foremost was scarce five yards distant when he

fired. Whether the ball took place on horse or man, could not be distinguished; for the former started, reared, and fell backwards, tumbling headlong over down the steep pass, and overturning another in its course. The rest instantly drew up, silenced, amazed, horror-struck; when the voice of Reza Koolee, shouting out in terrible accents from above, "Approach, miscreants!—come on, and meet the fate your deeds deserve!" completed their dismay.

"Punah-be-khodah! the Eeliauts! the Ghiranloos!—we shall every one be murdered!" exclaimed one of the foremost; and the rest seemed fully to participate in his alarm, for they turned, and rushed right down the pass.

"Now is our time!" said Reza Koolee—"let us mount, and get down hill while their panic holds—they will soon find out that it is a false alarm: but they have let us into one secret—the Ghiranloos must be near, and, if so, we are safe. Here, Jaffer, take hold of that rein—I will take this side:" and, setting the intrepid but exhausted Guleyaz once more upon her horse, and supporting the animal on either side, they rapidly descended.

The descent was painful, but short, and they began to hope that their danger was over; but ere they had ridden a mile along the plain, which was smooth and grassy, they heard once more the tread of their pursuers. "Aha! ye sons of burnt fathers! ye are too late!" shouted Reza Koolee; for, turning round the base of a projecting hillock, they saw the black tents of the Eeliauts in the chummun or meadow below them, their night-fires burning red in the cold morning light. "Raise the shout, Jaffer, and shew these ghorumsaugs that we know where we are!"

The well-known shout which now echoed from

the surrounding hills was scarcely twice repeated, when a reply arose from the tents, and, in another moment, figures with torches were seen issuing from the dark dwellings. The chase and peril of their friends was obvious; and the young men, seizing whatever arms were at hand, sprung up the hill to the rescue: but not until all chance of success had vanished did the pursuers at length give up their point; and the worn-out fugitives saw themselves delivered from the terrors of death or captivity, and received into the protection of a friendly and hospitable tribe.

During the whole of that day, the travellers remained at the camp of their friends, receiving from the ak-sakhal, or chief, all the comfort and assistance which rude but warm-hearted kindness could bestow. Guleyaz was taken in charge by the women; a bath, a rare luxury in an Eeliaut camp, was, with no small labour, prepared and administered; her limbs, kneaded and rubbed by the old women, were relieved of their painful stiffness, and a sound and long sleep restored her strength and spirits. That night, or rather the following morning, saw them once more in their saddles, escorted by a stout band of the Ghiranloo youth, on their way to the Yeilâk Ildooz, where they arrived in safety, and found Meerza Seleem anxiously expecting them.

"Alhumdulillah! shookhur! shookhur!" exclaimed the meerza with fervour, as he respectfully returned the warm embrace of the young chief—"thanks to the Most High for all his goodness! Ah, my lord! you cannot imagine the misery I have suffered for the last twenty-four hours, since the return of one of my messengers, who reported that you were nowhere to be found."

"Thanks be to Allah! indeed, my friend—for,

by the soul of my father! our peril was not small. Even at last, had it not been for these Ghiranloo Juans, we should have been in the tiger's clutch by this time. But, by the mercy of Allah! it is all over now; so, by your life, my good Seleem, tell me the worst — what has been going on at Mianabad?"

"Ah, my lord! what shall I say? — what, but that the day of judgment seems to have arrived? Your uncle, instigated by the counsels of that base-born Goorg Allee Beg — that half-blood Toorkoman, whom heaven will consign to perdition! — has become a demon. The faces of all who have hitherto found either favour or forbearance at his hands are now black in his eyes, and have been indiscriminately made the objects of extortion or of cruelty. He has suffered himself to be persuaded that a plot has been laid to deprive him of power and life; and, in this belief, he is making a desperate effort to crush all those whom he supposes to be hostile.

"The reins of prudence, as well as justice, being thrown aside, the heaviest shock of his tyranny has, as of course, fallen on the friends of your late father — may his rest in paradise be secure! — Adina Khan, Raheem Beg, the old darogha Cossim Allee, Hoosein Toormeh and Zerokh Ketkhodah, with the ak-sakhals of the Yeroolee and Izzutdehneh oolooses, were among the first arrested. Cossim Allee, and Raheem Beg, after being fearfully beaten, were beheaded in the outer court of the ark! ——"

"Beheaded? put to death? — Punah-be-khodah! bloody villain! the good old Cossim Allee! — *he* gone, and thus!"

"Aye, my lord, well may you say bloody villian! — Hoossein Toormeh had his eyes put out,

and many others of lesser note have been strangled or blinded, or desperately beaten; — the rest remained in confinement, and fresh arrests were making out hourly."

"Merciful Allah!" exclaimed the young chief, through his closed teeth; "but the day will come — the day will come! But how did you — how did your worthy father escape?"

"In truth, khan, better than our neighbours; yet the thing fell on us, as on all, like a thunder-clap, for no one believed that Nujjuff Allee Khan could be so insane as to disgust his whole tribe. The gates of the ark were guarded; of those who entered it none were permitted to leave it except the creatures of the tyrant. But a secret friend at the dur-khaneh found means to send me a hint and a warning. My father, poor old man, was at his village, and the express I sent reached him in time to enable him to fly to Radcan with most of his valuables. For my own part, without losing a moment, I mustered my family, sent the women outside the walls, partly in kajawahs, partly on foot, and passed the gates myself in disguise: but, in truth, so unpopular is your uncle's conduct, that even his own party murmur and hesitate at rigidly enforcing his commands; thus the departure of many from the town is winked at, if not connived at. It was perfectly well known, however, that I escaped as I did, for before night every gate was in the hands of the Semulghanees and Goklan Toorkomans, who are now in high favour. The khan knows he is playing a desperate game, and, therefore, he takes desperate measures. For my part, I instantly hurried to the chummun where my horses were kept, got every animal worth saving driven off, mounted every follower I could command, and made straight for this place, where,

inchallah! we shall at least be out of the immediate ravage of destruction that is making Mianabad a prison or a slaughter-house!"

"Omnipotent Allah! what a detail! — and this is the home of my fathers! Well saidst thou, Gulcyaz, that it was no home for his son! Villain! madman! — but the day of reckoning will surely come! Woe's me for old Cossim, poor good old man! what could he have done to exasperate the tyrant? — and the brave Raheem Beg, my old master, Allah! Allah! But to what do you attribute this sudden outbreak, Meerza? — the storm may have been long brewing, but what made it burst forth just now so violently?"

"In truth, khan, it is not easy to say," replied the meerza; "your uncle's connection with Goorg Allee Beg was much disliked by all the heads of families, who attribute to the evil influence of that unprincipled intriguer all the unpopular acts he has committed. And it has been thought, not without reason, that, fearful of some interposition which might defeat his purposes, Goorg Allee has made use of some plausible misrepresentation to bring the khan to the late fearful crisis; for no real ground, so far as I have been able to trace, existed for alarm to your uncle. Dissatisfaction there assuredly was, but it was far from having ripened into any active conspiracy. The flight of your sister, too (pardon me for alluding to it), necessary as it was, and fortunate as its result has been, when known, became, doubtless, a cause of alarm; it convinced your uncle that his own anxiety and meditated plans were suspected, if not known, and formed an additional motive for precaution on his part. Certain it is, that a cloud of Toorkoman horsemen, with some Semulghanee and Mianabad gholaums were sent out to search both

for her and for you. This it was which so deeply alarmed me, and I instantly sent off three trusty men — all I could command at the moment — perfect guides in these hills — in different directions to seek you out and warn you of your danger. I thank God they were not too late."

"And can you guess, or do you know, what the further designs of my uncle may be? or what projects or enterprizes he may have in view?" said Reza Koolee, after expressing to the meerza the deep sense he entertained of his steady and zealous friendship.

"As for that," replied the meerza, "I would represent that the prime mover in all these events is too skilful an intriguer to display more of the inside of either head or heart than occasion requires. Certain it is that Goorg Allee is to the full as paramount in authority at Semulghan as late events have shewn him to be here; for the profligate and violent Zekee Khan is nothing more than a puppet in his hands, and the high-minded Koords of Sareewan and Semulghan have become the slaves of a half-bred Goklan. The policy of this schemer has, for some time past, been obviously directed towards effecting a union of interests between the houses of Semulghan and Mianabad; but, from his notorious character, we may fairly infer that it is rather his own than his master's advantage which he aims at. To wield the power of both, would give him an influence in Koordistan and the Attock, scarcely to be resisted, and, in truth, there are circumstances which tend to render his success not altogether improbable."

"God forbid, astaffurillah! may God avert it!" exclaimed Reza Koolee. "But by the head of my father! he seems to be the enemy I have most to dread—more than once already has he crossed my

path. Thou knowest that to him I owe my being discovered at Kallah Feerozeh? — that he himself, in person, visited Sirafrauz Khan, to inform him of the secret, in hopes, doubtless, that I should get my throat cut."

"Allah! Allah! *He* at Kallah Feerozeh? Then good speed must he have made back to Mianabad, assuredly, the tidings he brought from thence is the cause of all this commotion. But Goorg Allee is a hawk that flies at all sorts of game. They say that even the exalted head of Sirafrauz himself is not beyond his aim. You are well out of that expedition of the Beyauts, khan — its returning cheer may be more sober than the mood in which it started."

"What means this man?" demanded Reza Koolee, eagerly. "What danger threatens Sirafrauz Khan?"

"Nay, I beg to state that I am not in the secret — a private report indeed reached me, and that is all I know — is it not true that he has gone on some chappow?"

"It is true — he started three days ago — the very morning I was forced to discover myself—but for that I should have accompanied him."

"And whither was he bound?"

"That is more than I know. The objects of his enterprizes were seldom known to more than a few of his most confidential leaders and elders. It was a distant one certainly, for we had orders to prepare ten days' provisions, and there were a number of yeduks."

"And what number of men had you?"

"More than three hundred picked *Juans*— fifty of their Gholaums, two score of matchlock men, and a *dusteh* of his best spearsmen."

"Then no doubt my informant was correct. He

has gone in the direction of Serrukhs. Some Beyaut villages in the plain of Nishapour were plundered, it is said by a party of Toorkomans from that quarter with an ooloos of Eeliauts from Kelaut, and they say the khan has gone to punish them — he will find it easier to catch quicksilver."

"My friend, you little know the khan: *he* is not the hawk to fly at game that he can't strike — be assured he knows what he is about."

"He may do so, and yet fail here. It is said that correct notice of his movements and purposes have been obtained, and that a strong body of the Goklan Toorkomans have been encouraged to waylay, harass, and, if they can, destroy the expedition on its return; and the booty with which it will be encumbered has been held out as an inducement, besides the promise of substantial assistance. This I have heard through one of my horse-keepers, to whom one of the Goklans let it out; and I do not doubt of its truth."

"Punah-be-khodah! there's a daring villain! Well may you say he flies at high game — but as daring a falcon has met with his match — what is his particular cause of quarrel against Sirafrauz Khan?—but indeed why should I ask that? we know of one object, and whether the foul dog hunts for himself, or plays jackall for his master, it is sufficient to make me doubly anxious to thwart him. Meerza, we must see to this."

"Barikillah! khan; you speak as if we had five hundred men armed and mustered at command; but look around you — what can these mountains yield us beyond shelter? — powerless, houseless, as we are, without men or money, what can we attempt? It is true that many of the best in Mianabad — many heads of villages and aouls, are eager to espouse the cause of the son of Mou-

zuffer Khan, were the season fitting, and all the more readily of late events. But, for any foreign object ——"

"Aye, Meerza, I understand — the son of Mouzuffer Khan appreciates the zeal of his friends, — at present, as you say, powerless — pennyless — they are right, they are right. How many, think you, Meerza," continued Reza Koolee, after a pause; "how many of my brave Juans — my old blood-drinkers, might be mustered at a pinch, did I require their services?"

"Hum — why it is a shrewd question, khan — I fear, not many; some have taken other service, since you required them no longer; others are probably employed by your uncle himself, — but these would come back at a moment's warning were you but to beat your drum; many have gone out of view altogether: it would be a hard matter now to collect half-a-dozen that you could depend on."

"Ah! my brave fellows! times are altered with us both. The day has been, that when my spear was hoisted in the morning a hundred would have mustered around it before noon! Well, Meerza, let some trusty person endeavour to whisper in the ear of a few of these old heroes, that Reza Koolee has an enterprize worthy of them, in view, and that he invites their service."

"Chushm!" responded the meerza, in the habitual tone of respect, yet casting a glance of considerable surprise at his young master.—"But if you should leave us, khan, what is to become of the lady, your sister. The Yeilak, in times of so much disturbance, is no fit place for persons such as her; and hell itself were preferable to the harem of her uncle."

"Aye, true — true, indeed; — poor Guleyaz — she participates somewhat too roughly of her bro-

ther's hardships;—this must be thought of. In the meantime, let her repose in confidence where she is. Our first concern is to consider of the means to be taken presently for personal security, and placing in safety whatever may have been rescued from the sweep of this sudden storm."

CHAPTER V.

THE EXPEDITION.

The narrative must now retrograde a little, to accompany the expedition which we have seen setting forth so joyously, on the morning of that day on which the tale commences. The object of their enterprize was substantially what the meerza supposed. The Yeksoo, a *teer*, or subdivision of the great Salera tribe of Toorkomans, inhabiting the desert near the old city of Serrukhs, had made several successful chappows in the vicinity of Mushed, and had even penetrated, in small and active troops towards the richer ballooks of Nishapour and Subzawar. But not until they had gained the alliance and co-operation of another petty tribe of Eeliauts, near Dereguz, by which a passage through the mountains to and from the plain was secured, did they venture on a scale sufficient to attack with effect a rich and flourishing village.

Thus assisted, however, the Yeksoo Toorkomans, in force, made a desperate march, and as desperate an attack upon Seeklaje, a village of Beyauts, some twenty miles distant from Nishapour, where certain family connections of Sirafrauz Khan resided, and

which thus, he considered, as under his especial protection. It was an affront which honour and interest equally called on him to revenge; and it was for this purpose that he had drawn forth the elite of his servants and his tribe. Of the few counsellors to whom he entrusted the project of his enterprise, and whose opinions he solicited upon the occasion, the greater number gave unqualified praise to the spirit of their chief, and predicted unlimited success. Others, again, cautious old men, shook their heads in silence, at a proposal so much at variance with the spirit of their own prudence. The blind Zulfecar alone lifted up his voice like a bird of ill omen, and prophesied woe and loss from an enterprise which should lead the force and youth of the tribe so far from their own bounds. "I tell thee, Sirafrauz Khan, that thy mother's brother would be the last man to bid thee hold thy hand, when lifted against a Koord. But are there not enough to fight with at our very doors? Have not these dogs and children of the devil defiled our beards, and trod upon our hearts for ages past, and yet we patiently endure such injuries, and present our heads to the dust they shower upon us! Why dost thou not lead thy followers against Nujjuff Allee and his crew? Doth the blood of thy father and thy kindred cry in vain from the earth against them? Do not these old sightless eyes appeal to thy heart? Must the call of ambition be ever heard, and the voice of natural affection lift itself in vain — the cry of revenge be stifled? But be it so — proceed in thy course — let the prudent counsels of age be despised — follow the impetuous dictates of fiery youth — the result will declare your error."

The murmur of disapprobation which that speech gave rise to, was hushed at the voice of the khan,

who replied thus: — "Brother of my mother, may Allah forbid that thy words should meet with aught but respect from thy servant or the elders of his tribe. But the case is not as thou hast represented it. The people injured are of our own tribe and family. To me they look up, as to their only remaining head and protector; and foul shame it were to me, should I suffer them to be plundered and destroyed unassisted. The khan has said, my friends, that we have enemies at our gates; it is true we have so; yet think you we shall be the more able to oppose their effect, by neglecting the cause and the appeal of those from whom a portion of our power ought to be derived? Let us revenge the foully slaughtered and plundered inhabitants of Seeklaje, let us prove to distant aggressors that our arms are long, and that we are not to be insulted with impunity, and then turn our faces, brightened with success, and terrible with the frown of slaughter, against the more powerful hereditary enemies of our house."

Great was the applause with which the khan's reply was hailed — some still doubted, it is true; and old Zulfecar grumbled; but the enterprise was resolved on, and forces were summoned to muster as we have related. Yet there was something unusual both in the manner of the preparations and the incidents which accompanied them — some deficiency of customary alacrity — some failure of adequate attendance, which, to the cool and practised eye might have denoted a less perfect confidence than usually characterised the chappows of Sirafrauz Khan. The principal moonujoom, or astrologer, too, in casting his calculations for a happy hour, thrice failed in bringing out the desired result; nor did the aspect of the heavens at last appear particularly flattering. On the very day pre-

vious to that commencing their march, an antelope, which had been chased by two of the gholaums, got away, even after it had been so much wounded as to lie lifeless for awhile — a dog belonging to the fort had been pursued by two wolves, and a more than ordinary howling and wailing among the jackalls had been remarked during the same night.

These, however, were the whispers of alarmists. Among the more sanguine and youthful of the party neither doubt nor uneasiness prevailed — no forebodings, no falterings existed. To them neither the insulting and ill-timed message from Semulghan, nor the singular discovery of the long-disguised chief of Mianabad, carried any alarming presages; and while others deemed these events so directly confirmatory of previous omens, as to render proceeding totally unadviseable, they only deprecated the unseasonable delay which detained them for a moment from the work of plunder. The timid party held it peculiarly unfortunate that the discussions to which these circumstances gave rise, had detained the expedition beyond the appointed and fortunate hour. But this, again, was overruled by the bolder counsellors, who considered them to have been averted, as we have already said, by the act of bringing the horses ready saddled and accoutred to the ground in proper time; and they argued, that, at all events, the chance of advantage from delay would be counterbalanced by the serious ill fortune which would assuredly attend turning back from an enterprise already commenced.

The season at which the expedition took place, although interesting, and in some respects favourable, was in others ill-suited for warlike operations. The festival of the No-roz was just over, the heavy

snows and hard frosts of winter had given way to a more genial season. The *chumuns*, or lower meadows were beginning to assume the rich emerald tint of early spring, and sheets of yellow, purple, or crimson blossoms covered the hard gravelly soil. Millions of insects were fluttering in the sunshine; every bush was vocal, and the lark poured down its carols from mid-air. The labours of the husbandman had commenced in right earnest; and every creature that could be made available to drag a plough was put in requisition to prepare the ground for seed. Yet snow still lay thick on the higher grounds; the weather was rough and variable, and the very showers which fell to open and refresh the earth were often bitter with sleet and snow. Thus the surface of the sahrah was in many places so wet, and the streams so much swollen, as to render travelling painful and tedious.

The advantages of this state of the season were, the springing grass, and in some places the green corn, which afforded a nutritious food for their horses in case of want. Its disadvantages were the increased fatigue and discomfort necessarily incurred, and which failed not to harass and exhaust both men and animals. Such was the aspect of affairs, and such the circumstances, under which Sirafrauz Khan commenced this important expedition; and, notwithstanding all the sinister omens which attended its outset, the glitter and the bustle, and the high spirits and admirable equipment of the party, inspired a feeling of exhilaration and confidence which flattered every one concerned with hopes of brilliant success.

During four days and nights they proceeded as such chappows usually do, selecting the least frequented parts of the country for their route, and halting at the hour of morning prayer, for a short

space, to feed their horses and refresh themselves. Often were they drenched by heavy showers, or chilled by a fierce wind, or scorched by a burning sun, according to the caprice of the season, but still they held on their way unchecked. Woe was to the unlucky wretches with whom they fell in; for if laid hold of they were sure to be unceremoniously put to death, in order that alarm might not be spread by them. On the third night they crossed the rich Chumun-e-Chinnarau, so celebrated for its pastures; and leaving the old tower of Radcan well upon their right, ascended the northern hills of that long valley, from the tops of which they looked down upon the district of Dereguz.

This was the purposed scene of action; and until the proper time for action should arrive, the party concealed themselves and their horses in one of the deep ravines in the skirts of the hills, capable of affording a little food and water for their horses; centinels were placed on all sides to guard against surprise, and a keen look out was maintained by them, for some unhappy native, on whom they might seize, in order to wring intelligence from him regarding the state of the neighbourhood. It was not that the party was deficient in knowledge of the ground. Care had been taken to have persons with them who were guides in the country, and the object of attack had not only been marked out, but its weak parts particularly ascertained. What they required was, to learn whether any alarm had been taken, or any change made in the defences or strength of the place.

The object thus devoted to destruction was the village of Seradeh, containing more than a hundred and fifty families, which lay in a hollow of the hills, watered by a copious rivulet that descended

from a deep cleft in their bosom. Removed out of the ordinary track of plundering parties, except such as must approach by the passes from the Attock, and protected against these by alliances and arrangements with the Toorkomans of that neighbourhood, who purchased the liberty of these passes, with indemnity to this and some other villages of the district, Seradeh, secure from the attacks which desolated the greater part of the border country, flourished in peace and comfort. Its cultivation extended over a rich slope, irrigated by a plentiful stream; its herds and flocks were numerous; its habitations were substantial and in good repair; orchards and gardens smiled around it; and a lover of the picturesque would have been enchanted with the clothing of scattered wood which fringed the streams, and varied the mountain slopes behind it.

But the inhabitants of Seradeh cared little about the picturesque. They were void even of the innocent tastes, the simplicity of mind, which generally characterise men devoted to agriculture and attached with fond affection to their native spot. They were, in fact, plunderers by profession; their agricultural pursuits arose fortuitously out of the circumstances of their situation, which afforded not only peculiar advantages for cultivation, but a most favourable market for their produce. Their soil was excellent, water abundant; and their connection with the predatory tribes afforded them every facility of advantageous barter. Thus their disposition to husbandry was rather superinduced on their original character of plunderers than the converse. A part of the men, with the women and children, cultivated the village lands, while the rest, a mongrel brood, holding a middle rank between the wanderers of the desert, and the more settled peasantry of the upper country, followed

the Eeliaut occupation of shepherds, when they were not, as was more frequently the case, united with their robber allies upon some marauding expedition.

In most countries, the existence of such a community for any continuance of time would be held as a fanciful and impossible phenomenon. In Khorasan, however, a vast and always unsettled province, constantly a prey to the feuds of its chiefs and the incursion of barbarians, where the sceptre of even an absolute monarch has been swayed with imperfect effect, such anomalies have been, and continue frequent; and if a perfect and faithful picture of the state of the districts we are attempting to describe *could* be laid before the European reader, he would be struck with equal astonishment and disgust. Remote from reach of the powers who might have punished the crimes of its inhabitants, protected by its formidable alliances from the vengeance of weaker enemies, and maintaining with the neighbouring Koordish chiefs a sort of armed neutrality—a forbearance rendered mutually expedient by their peculiar and varying intercourse with the border and desert tribes, Seradeh continued its iniquitous courses unmolested,—detested, reviled, but tolerated, as an irremediable, if not a necessary, evil, which no one felt it his duty or interest to run the hazard, or incur the expense, of suppressing: and its people, emboldened by impunity, became more daring in their enterprises, and struck at higher game. It was motives arising from this tacit arrangement that led them to attempt and achieve the chappow of the village of Seeklaje; for they were satisfied that their distance from the residence of the chief who protected that village would secure them from his

vengeance, even should he be seriously disposed to resent the affront.

But they knew not Sirafrauz Khan. They miscalculated the strength of his feelings on points of honour and of duty, and they underrated his power—or, at all events, his quickness and decision in using it. Independent of the indignation which he really felt, and his commiseration for the unfortunate Seeklajees, the Beyaut chief conceived that the occasion afforded a fitting opportunity for establishing his own character us a father of his tribe, and his power as their protector, upon a footing of the most perfect confidence. His views reached even further. He contemplated the measure as one which might ultimately place in his hands the means of wresting from the feeble grasp that held it his paternal government and city of Nishapour, and of replacing himself in the full and conspicuous rank which his ancestors once held in Khorasan. He resolved, therefore, to strike a blow which should appal his enemies, and put an end for the future to the loss and inconvenience arising from such petty attacks.

The village of Seradeh, like all others in that part of the country, was surrounded by a wall of mud, sufficiently high and strong to protect it against desultory attacks; and in former times, before the long absence of danger had rendered the inhabitants careless, towers had been built in the field, at certain distances around it, to afford refuge to those who, while employed in agricultural duties, might suddenly be cut off from the enemy. But security, "man's chiefest enemy," had supplanted all wholesome fear; the towers were neglected, and the walls themselves were in some parts ruinous. These facts were not unknown

to the assailants, who reckoned on them, in some measure, as a means of success.

Attacks like those we are describing are generally made in the grey of the morning, when the inhabitants, shaking off sleep, are rousing themselves to prepare for the labours of the day. The gates are then thrown open; the people issue forth to their work, or to perform their ablutions; the cattle, which are kept about the village, and which at night are driven within the walls, are then turned out to graze; and in the unguarded time of this general stir, the ambushed enemy pour upon the place, and most commonly succeed in making it their prey.

In the present case, before the hour of dawn, while the party, after feeding their horses, were impatiently waiting in the recesses of a dell about a mile and a half from the place, they heard the tinkling of a mule-bell and the song of the muleteer. All was hushed as death; and, before they had the smallest suspicion of their situation, four unfortunate individuals were surrounded by a score of the Beyauts, knocked from their horses, bound with their own girdles, their persons thoroughly relieved of all superfluities whether of clothing or of property; and in this condition they were led, or rather dragged, before the chief.

Sternly interrogated as to their knowledge of the situation of the village, they swore, with cringing gestures, and in whining accents — by their heads and souls — by the head of the khan, and by every oath they could rattle from their trembling lips, that they were strangers — ignorant of every thing but the general road to the village. "Is that the case?" said the khan, frowning — "send hither Goorbah Mehtur, and two of you get whips and thongs ready."

A dark looking truculent fellow now came forwards; who, holding a light to the persons of the captives, pronounced two of them to be assuredly *Jalloyers*, and inhabitants of the village or its vicinity. "You hear what he says," said the khan — "now give your information without more ado, or expect the *felek*."

"*Ahi! darough ust! be sir-e-shumah you me khourid!* It is false — by your head, he is eating dirt!" said the man earnestly; but the mehtur persisted, and the poor wretches were instantly seized, and subjected to a merciless infliction of stripes, from the horsewhips of the party. Still, no intelligence could be elicited: time pressed; the leaders became impatient; and the khan, whether he believed the mehtur's account, or considered it expedient, under all circumstances, to make a leap in the dark, addressed the trembling captives — "Fellows, you are known — your lives depend on what ye shall now tell, and I demand it from you for the last time: we know that the village is open; that the wall is ruinous; but we seek for certain particulars, which may save us some time and trouble: now, open your eyes — declare to me instantly what is the weakest point of the wall. If ye tell truly, your lives shall be spared— if falsely, or if ye are obstinate, beware! Let the executioners be ready!" And, at the word, two stout gholaums stepped forth — one to the side of each prisoner, with drawn swords.

"*Arz mekunum dur khidmut-e-shumah,*" whined one of them, in a slow, faltering tone — "I humbly beg to state, in your service, that I am a poor stranger, and know nothing."

"Is it so, truly?" said the khan, sternly — "then, assuredly, you can be of no use to us — *be koosh!*" and, at the word, the ready blade of

one of the gholaums flashed bluely in the air, the head of the unfortunate victim flew forward several yards, and rolled down the bank, whilst the body fell convulsed at the feet of his companion, covering him with the spouting blood. The stern expedient succeeded — "Amaun! amaun!" exclaimed the second of the two, trembling with horror; "I will tell — I will tell all!"

"Good!" said the khan — "our ears are open — say on;" and, in a voice scarcely articulate with terror and eagerness, the poor creature began to explain, that, at the side of the village next the hill, where a water-course had been carried in from the *Roodkhoneh*, in order to furnish the village with a supply of water, the wall under which it passed had been damaged by a flood, and that the breach thus caused had never been repaired, but was imperfectly stopped up with bushes. With a feverish species of anxiety, as if he felt that his very life depended upon being thoroughly understood, he added many trifling particulars; and finished by declaring that if required, he would himself guide them to the place. A laugh was the only reply to this proposal, in which the poor wretch attempted to join with a sort of hysterical effort, as if he hoped to secure their sympathy, by entering into their feelings; and upon the strength this, he ejaculated an earnest petition for mercy to *his* house and family, describing the locality of his dwelling, with as much eagerness of precision, as if there had really been a hope of its being attended to.

"Have a care!" said the chief, with a stern frown — "see that thou hast told us the truth — on that depends thy life: thou shalt remain with my people; and, should we find thee to have eaten the smallest particle of abomination, thou seest the

corse of that fool before thee — thy own shall help with it to feed the jackalls."

The party now mounted again, and silently approached the village. The morning was dark, the sky cloudy; and it was not without some difficulty that they picked their way, along the foot of the mountains, among the broken ground and bushes. Having reached a hollow, suited to their purpose, the khan divided his force into three parties. Of these, one on foot was directed to proceed, under guidance of Goorbah Mehtur, and to make good their way along the water-course to the breach in the wall, of which they had received information. Another, smaller in number, received orders to approach the walls with all possible secrecy, by favour of inclosures and inequalities; but not to attempt escalade, until the principal attack should be made in front. The khan himself led the third division, which consisted of half his force, mounted. With these, he resolved to make a dash at the gateway, not doubting that he should carry the place by surprise: at the worst, should any untoward event occur, and a retreat become necessary, he should thus be prepared to cover and conduct it in order.

But no sign of preparation appeared — no symptom that could betoken alarm on the part of the villagers. It seemed as if Providence, weary of the vices of the Seradehans, had abandoned them to the approaching foe. The howl of a distant dog, as it bayed the waning moon, or was roused by the approach of a prowling jackall or hyena, the low of an impatient cow, or a sheep bleating for its lamb, were the only sounds that met the ear. All was silence and security, as the three divisions moved from the hollow, leaving the remaining horses and the prisoners tied hand and foot, under charge of a few trusty guards.

The dull trampling of men and horses, as they moved off towards their several points of attack, died away gradually upon the ear of these guards, who watched every sound with anxious, and somewhat sullen silence; for, theirs was not a grateful or a coveted office. A short, but painful period of suspense succeeded; but the long uneasy growl of alarm, and sharp quick bark of several dogs, gave proof that these watchful guardians had taken the alarm. Then came a loud and uninterrupted peal — and soon after a mingled uproar of shouts, and shrieks, and yells, that announced, beyond all doubt, the commencement of the attack in earnest.

It had, in truth, commenced. The khan and his party, by favour of the darkness, had advanced within some hundred yards of the gateway, when the challenge of the dogs was heard on the other side of the village. "Hah! no time to be lost now," said he to the officer, who rode with him in front — "we must dash at the gateway as soon as we open the end of this wall — pass the word back." Accordingly, halting to let the last men close up, the khan waved his sword — every stirrup at once pressed the horses' flanks, and, in another moment, the whole poured forward like a torrent, the roar of their horses' hoofs being still the only sound that issued from their ranks.

The ground in front of the gateway was broken and uneven; fragments of walls, ruined houses, pits from whence the mud that formed them had been dug, the remains of gardens with shrubs and bushes, intervened to check the force of a charge, and many accidents occurred to the assailants from their ignorance of the ground — but little did this avail the wretched villagers. At the moment when the horsemen shewed themselves the

gates were thronged with human beings and cattle issuing forth. Many were already scattered over the fields, and the lowing and rush of the animals drowned, for a moment, the thunder of the charge. Even when, at length, the approaching band of enemies was observed, so complete had been the surprise, that few comprehended the truth until they heard the appalling shout, and "Allah-ho-akber! — kill! — cut them down! — no quarter to the dogs!" filled the air. Then did the stupified keepers attempt too late to shut the gates; they were thronged with their own people; the confusion increased each moment; several cattle, thrown down in the bustle, formed a temporary impediment: but it was rather fatal to the attacked than troublesome to the assailants — guards and gatewards were speared while attempting to force the gates to. A few of the men, armed in haste, attempted to make a stand within the gateway, but the charge of three or four well-armed gholaums bore them to the earth, where they were trampled down and speared by those who followed.

A cry of women and children next rose from within, and a fearful rush of helpless half-clothed creatures bore back for a moment, by sheer weight, the armed men who were advancing. It was the party that had forced an entry by the ruined wall, and were driving all before them. Resistance was vain; — a determined man might here and there be seen fiercely defending the entrance of his dwelling with the spear snatched up in haste, but, in an instant, it was shorn from his hands, and his threshold was deluged with his own blood. The shrieks of the women, and the screams of helpless children rung through the air, and the hopeless cry of "Amaun! amaun!" was thrust

down the throat of the utterer with the sword or the spear-point — for the thirst of blood, like that of gold, grows by indulgence, and increases even to rabidness.

Motives of policy at length induced the khan himself to interpose and suspend the slaughter. The remainder, few, hopeless and unresisting, were spared for the time; — stript and bound, every surviving creature was dragged beyond the walls, while houses and holes and corners were rapidly but effectually searched by the spears as well as the eyes of the victors. The inquisition brought many a miserable object to light — wretched mothers, more terrified even for their infants than themselves, were dragged from the recesses of their private chambers. Young girls, half dead with terror, whose very souls seemed to rush from their bodies in the shriek which they uttered as the rude hand of a gholaum grasped their shoulder. Sickness, decrepid age — all were torn from their lurking-places to swell the crowd of captives, and many an ill-suppressed scream or groan was heard as the spears were plunged in the limbs or body of some concealed wretch who trusted to the darkness of his den to elude observation.

But a still more terrible revealer of secrets was yet to be employed. Each dwelling had been strictly searched; every valuable that could be discovered, abstracted; roofs were torn off to admit the light; walls thrown down to discover secret recesses; the miserable owners were tortured and threatened to discover their hidden hordes. When all was finished the call for *fire* was raised, and, in a moment, blazing torches were applied with mischievous alacrity to every combustible thing. The village, from its vicinity to the forests, and consequent command of wood, was more com-

posed of that inflammable substance than those of the more central parts of Persia: the fire, therefore, spread with rapidity, and, in a few minutes, the whole exhibited a mass of flames.

The light glared upon a sickening and dreadful scene. The objects of the chappow had been various. The khan proposed to punish and to warn, as well as to plunder and revenge — to strike the daring marauders of the Attock with wholesome terror, and inspire them with high ideas of his power. But he also held in mind the condition of the many unfortunate Seeklajees who were then languishing as captives in the Toorkoman Oolooses, and he resolved, if possible, to take alive as many of the Seradehans as might enable him to treat with effect for the ransom or exchange of the Beyauts. To select such prisoners from the mass now gathered together was the object — for to carry off the whole was impossible; and lamentable was the fate of those who were rejected. To leave them unmolested was contrary to the stern policy that dictated the enterprize, and even to the safety of the conquerors; the alternative was slaughter — cold-blooded, indiscriminate massacre. Males and females, from the ages of twelve to forty were set aside, and heart-rending were the shrieks and lamentations that arose as the feeble and the aged were separated from their younger relatives. The daughter clung to the aged mother; the vigorous son to his decrepid father; young girls, in speechless agony, clove to the nurses and grand-dames who had watched them from childhood: but, worse than all, distracted mothers clasped their screaming infants to their bosoms, and dared the swords of the soldiers who attempted to force them from their offspring.

The khan, though a kind and generous man,

was still a Khorasanee, inured from youth to scenes of blood and rapine. On the present occasion he but followed the customs of his country; and, though an emotion of pity or compassion might arise as he saw age or weakness, beauty or helpless childhood, writhing in the stern gripe of his soldiers, and though he might turn away, for a moment, from the horrors which were inseparable from such an enterprise, he would have deemed interference as weak as it would have been vain: for, though he could exact an implicit obedience from his people on all points of duty, there were reciprocal obligations between them, and the rights of adventurers or soldiers on such occasions were too well understood to admit of infringement on the side of their chief.

The shrieks of agony ceased by degrees; the loud appeals and lamentations of the survivors had sunk into low wailings, or the groan of sullen anguish; and the pause of despair was only interrupted by the wild cry of some half-burned wretch, as he rushed from the flames, shouting the useless Amaun! to the fierce pursuer at his heels. But the sounds of grief swelled once more into frantic exclamation, even above the uproar of the tumult, when the party, having gathered together their plunder and bound it on the backs of such beasts of burthen as suited their purpose, forced the unhappy captives to rise and follow their new masters.

With many a look of anguish at the bloody heap of carcases that once were their kindred and friends, and a wild glance at their burning homes, the miserable women, unable even to struggle, suffered themselves to be lifted upon the spare horses or placed behind their captors; while the men, with their arms tied behind them, and at-

tached by a rope to the saddle-girths of their guards, were forced to take their weary way on foot. The daring and dangerous nature of the enterprize permitted not of their encumbering themselves with cattle or booty calculated to embarrass their retreat; such, therefore, of these as fell in their way, shared the fate of their owners, and the horses and swift camels were even too few to accommodate the prisoners. A few mothers desperate of their lives, from whose arms the soldiers could not pluck their infants, were permitted to carry them, and even placed on such beasts as could be spared, for these heartless men well knew that the toil of the march would soon rid them of their innocent but feeble burthens.

The followers of Syrafrauz Khan were adepts in their trade — their work was executed as rapidly as completely. Within three hours' time the village was attacked, taken, pillaged and burned; — near five hundred human beings cut to pieces; and half that number, retained as captives, with the whole moveable property of the village, were on their way towards the Kallah Feerozeh.

The march, as all such marches are, was, to the wretched prisoners, a protraction of torment. Urged of necessity to the greatest possible speed, the women soon became exhausted, and clung, in helpless weakness, to those with whom they rode, or, stooping over the saddle-bow of their horses, would have dropped to the earth but for the bands with which they were fastened to their seats; while the men, half-naked, marking the ground with blood from their wounded feet, stumbled and fell continually, and were only to be roused by twitches from the cords, or blows from the spear-shafts of their brutal guards. Life, however, is dear to all, even with the pros-

pect of a hard captivity in their view: the miserable wretches still strove to toil on — for well did they know that to sink was to die. The spear-thrust or the sword soon terminated the sufferings of those who could not proceed; and even the first day's march exhibited many ghastly traces of such summary relief.

The first halts of such a retreat, are always short and painful, as the object is rather to refresh the jaded horses and enable them to advance with speed, than to afford relief either to captives or captors. The latter, inured to the exertion, mounted, and well apparelled, are able to support the toil; — the former are of too small account to be considered: the weak and worthless perish, the strong and valuable survive. The latter part of the second day's march had been rendered more than ordinarily painful by heavy showers of snow and sleet, which blew in the face of the party and lay thick upon the gravelly slopes, or formed plashy pools on the low levels of the plains. A mountain-pass had been surmounted; the weary captives could do no more; men and horses were worn out; and of the weak and the young, more than one was found stiff dead, when, as evening closed in, they came to take them from their horses at the halting-ground. Of the infants that had hitherto survived, the greater number lay pale and inanimate on the bosoms of their mothers, who, chilled and worn out themselves, could afford to their offspring, neither warmth nor food — sorrow and wailing had ceased.—Mute, subdued, the silence of exhaustion and despair prevailed among the captives; even among the victors, all sound of exultation or triumph had sunk under the influence of fatigue and discomfort.

The hour of sunset was past, but no golden light

had gladdened the dreary scene. The unbitted horses, with hanging heads, ate from their tobrahs, the full allowance of barley which the plunder of the village had furnished, while their weary riders strove to light fires with the withered but wet weeds which grew on the sahrah around, or cut up in rude fashion for roasting the carcase of some camel whose burden had possibly been disposed of on the way, or whose galled back and wounded feet rendered it unable to proceed. All were busily employed, and doubtless, less vigilant than usual, when a man, of swarthy complexion, clad in the Toorkoman dress, and mounted upon a powerful well-appointed horse, was suddenly observed amongst the party, making straight for the point where a pennon or banner, stuck upon a spear in the earth, indicated the spot where the khan was seated. The stranger having approached, made a courteous inclination and uttered the words, "Salaam aleikoom! Amaun ust! it is peace!"

"Aleikoom-is-salaam! let it be peace!" responded the khan, rising to his knees with suitable politeness. "If thou art a friend, welcome! dismount, and be seated, and partake of the fare we can offer."

"I am here, khan," said the stranger, "as a friend, but it is to lift the voice of warning in your ear, and not to delay what may be needful for you to do, by tarrying here myself. You have given me the amaun, and I am your invited guest — freely I have come, freely I must have leave to depart — to this, pledge me your word, and let me taste of your bread — then listen to my tidings."

"I swear to thee by my head and by your own soul!" said the khan, breaking a piece from the cake of bread before him; "that there is peace between us, so long as thou committest no act of

hostility against me or mine — freely thou hast come, freely thou shalt depart — by this token we receive you as our guest."

"Then khan," said the stranger, who had dismounted, but who still held his horse by the bridle; "I have to represent that your steps are watched, and your counsels betrayed. You are marching into an ambush, and will be attacked by a force which, encumbered and worn out as you are, you will not be able to resist."

"Sorry tidings, friend, indeed," observed the khan calmly, after bending a keen look upon his stranger guest; "may we know to whom we are indebted for them, and how they have been obtained?"

"For myself, khan, I am nameless — I am less than the least in all but my desire to serve thee; and rest assured, that my tidings are not the less true that the source must remain unknown to thee."

"Stranger, we scarcely need to tell thee," said the khan, "that friends are not a fruit to be found on every camel thorn-bush in the desert — canst thou imagine us so rash as to give credit to a perfect stranger even though he come as thou hast done, with fair speeches and courteous demeanour — but let that pass. Thou hast told us our danger — hast thou aught to propose as the means of avoiding it?"

"Such was indeed my desire, khan — and yet, like a prophet of evil, my power is limited to declare the danger. To a warrior like thee, what need to talk of vigilance. When the traveller knows that a lion is in his path, he turns and takes another. Thou art now on the way which leads by the Dehineh Toorbah — wert thou to change thy route by nightfall, and take that which crosses

Chummun-e-dhakneh, it might baffle thy foes and enable thee to elude them."

"And pray, friend," said the khan, after some consideration, and another keen survey of his adviser, "who may these enemies be, of whose movements thou seemest so well informed — and from what quarter are we to look for their attack?"

"It were well for us both, khan, perhaps," replied the stranger, that I were more in their counsels; but this much I would state — that last night the Sultaun Meydaun was swarming with Gocklan Toorkomans, and that the khan of Mianabad was said to have mustered his troops — you will guess as well as I what that portends."

"Hah! — evil befal them! — not unlikely," muttered the khan. "And, stranger," continued he, "what warrant canst thou give that thou thyself are not one of these threatened enemies? — what proof hast thou of thy honesty to give us? — how can we know that thou art not a spy come to cheat us into a reliance on thy word, and to betray us to the very foes thou talkest of?"

"Were treachery in my heart, khan," replied the stranger calmly, "what need was there for me to run the risk of coming among thy people. Vigilant as they may be, before they saw my approach I was in the midst of them. If a spy, I had already gained my object. Thy halting place, thy strength, the condition of thy people were already known to me, without incurring the hazard. If my designs were hostile, what advantage could I have contemplated by awakening thy caution, and putting thee on thy guard?—Be satisfied — thou seest that I can be no other than thy well-wisher. I would that my power were equal to my will. If still thou dost doubt, and will neglect my counsel,

the error and the loss will be thine own — it is enough."

"But if thou art a friend, why not continue with us. Knowing whence danger may come, thou couldst teach us the better how to shun it."

"I would explain, khan, that were I to remain with thee, I could do no more than has been done, and far less than I may yet do; wert thou to break thy word and detain me, thou mightest lose a friend at need, but assuredly would not diminish the number of thy adversaries — be content — thou art prudent — thou seest I am sincere; credit my tidings, and regulate yourself by them — Bismillah! my duty is discharged, and I depart."

"It is well, friend — thy tidings, it is true, are neither gratifying nor explicit — wert thou to remain with us, our confidence in thee might be greater. — As it is, thanks for thy warning — it will not decrease our vigilance; — if true, God is great! — we are in his hands — if false — we are soldiers, prepared for all chances; and those who may attack us will meet with no easy prey. May your steps be fortunate — farewell!"

"Amen!" responded the Toorkoman, "and God grant you prosperity, khan, and a happy issue out of all your difficulties, for you are a bold leader and a generous chief — may your shadow never diminish!" With these words, springing on his horse, and making his way through the crowd that had assembled to hear and see the stranger, he stuck his heels into the sides of his powerful charger, and was soon lost sight of, in the increasing darkness of the night. For one moment the khan thought of ordering a party to mount and follow the stranger, in order to discover whither he took his course; but where was the horse or man that was fit to keep sight of the fresh and fleet horse of

the Toorkoman ? — he abandoned the thought, and remained for some time silently ruminating on the singularity of the whole affair.

Various, indeed, were the conjectures to which it gave rise. Many were dissatisfied, that one coming in so questionable a character should have been permitted so easily to depart. Some broadly denounced him a traiterous spy, with whom no terms should have been kept, and that instant death was the least he should have received. Others, influenced perhaps by the depressing circumstances of their situation, were disposed to view the stranger as some evil spirit or dark magician, who had come to lure them to their destruction; and they swore that both horse and man made their way through the halting ground more like spirits than creatures of the earth, and had vanished immediately as they quitted its precincts. Great agitation prevailed, and the minds of men already weakened by fatigue, were powerfully affected by an event which brought to mind, with much exaggeration, all the evil omens which were said to have occurred at the commencement of the enterprise.

In the mean time the khan, who felt all the deep responsibility of his situation, held council with his chiefs and officers, whose opinions and speculations were as various as those of their men; and though they did not so openly lay blame on their chief for his honourable observance of his word, in their secret heart, they deprecated the leniency which permitted one, whom they believed to be nothing less than a spy, to gather the information he required, and then depart unscathed and triumphant. But the important point was how to conduct themselves under the threatened evil; for be the stranger friend or foe, it seemed certain that evil overhung them. That they had been watched on

their way appeared certain—even the stranger's presence proved that their march had not been altogether unmarked. If any confidence was to be put in his communication, the route they were pursuing would expose them to attack. On the other hand, supposing him a spy, could any thing be more hazardous than to take the very path he had indicated, and to place themselves as it were at his mercy.

After some deliberation, the khan himself decided the question. Inclined as he was, both from reasoning on the matter, and from considering the open and collected manner of the stranger, which found an advocate in his own breast, to place confidence in the warning he had received, yet unwilling to hazard the safety of his whole party, by a too implicit reliance on one who after all might be a traitor, he resolved, after a halt of four hours, which would be requisite to refresh the horses and the men, to pursue their march for some distance in the same direction. But at a certain point, where the valley terminated in a cluster of low hills, among which lay the Dehineh Toorbah, he purposed that the party should divide; the greater number, with the prisoners and plunder, striking off to the left, towards the districts of Nishapour and Subzawar, a longer route, indeed, and more exposed to observation than he could have desired, but free at least from the probability of attack from the dreaded quarter—while the smaller portion, fifty or sixty in number, with himself at their head, should pursue their original route, thus interposing between the main body and the enemy, and covering their march. In this way he conceived that he should defeat the hostile or treacherous designs of his foes, however directed; for he calculated that the part of his force which he exposed would mislead them

during the night, and, consisting of his best men and most serviceable horses, would, he hoped, be able to withstand any attack that might be made, and make good their retreat without incurring a severe loss.

After some discussion and explanations, this arrangement was agreed to by all: and at two hours before midnight, the halting-place, marked by many a ghastly token, was abandoned; the prisoners and booty, arranged for proceeding with the utmost speed, were collected under their appointed guards, and placed under the guidance of the most trusty chiefs. The khan himself led the way with those selected for the more perilous duty of accompanying himself; and the division of the force was so distinctly made, that, on arriving at the appointed spot, the two parties could separate without either confusion or tumult. By the hour of midnight, that point was reached, when, in great good order and perfect silence, the guards and their prisoners filed off, and were soon buried in the intricacies of the clustering hills. The khan, with his diminished numbers, pursued the original route, maintaining strict vigilance, in expectation each moment to be roused by the fierce yells and rapid charge of some ambushed foe.

Night, however, elapsed without alarm, and the cold uncertain light of morning had begun to steal over the east; the men, weary and worn, were nodding on their horses' necks, scarcely contending against the overpowering desire to sleep; the horses, themselves, hanging their heads towards the ground, paced mechanically on, rousing ever and anon their drowsy riders by a stumble or a trip; the carawuls, or outriders, themselves, who were sent a-head on either flank to explore the way, and guard against surprise, performed their

duty imperfectly; even the khan, although kept awake by anxiety, rode musingly before his men, his head half sunk upon his breast, in silent thought.

Such was the state of the party, when they entered the jaws of a gloomy valley, through which ran a stream, increased at the time by the fall of snow and rain. A narrow, undulating tract, covered with withered grass and weeds, among which the soft verdure of spring was just beginning to peep, bordered the water-course; and hills of no great height, springing from a maze of earthy irregularities, formed the sides of the glen or pass, which stretched for several fursungs through similar country.

The confined and somewhat dangerous character of the ground, startled the khan from his reverie; and he had just intonated the customary "Khuberdâr!" which was answered by his officers with the usual "Hazir!" when a whistle was heard on the left; a loud shout from many quarters replied; a thundering tramp of horses succeeded; and a cloud of horsemen rushed on all sides from the clefts and hollows of the hills, shaking their spears, and uttering loud taunts and execrations.

"Steady, men! be cool! — remember who you are!" shouted the khan, all alive to the danger and importance of the moment — "Bismillah! beat these fellows back!—so—keep together, and look to me!" and the men, suddenly roused from the apathy of weariness, did, in fact, rally round the leader whom they loved and confided in. They bravely withstood the first violent and perplexing shock, and for a while their enemies recoiled from the stubborn face which they presented; but the jaded horses of the Beyauts could not long sustain the continued charges of fresh assail-

ants, who came on in clouds that seemed both innumerable and irresistible. After a short and severe struggle they broke and fled, leaving the khan, with a few of his gholaums, surrounded by the Toorkomans, who closed fast around them, as one after another went down before the blows of their vigorous adversaries.

While hope remained, the khan did all a leader could to rally his men, still striving to effect a retreat, or to succeed in cutting a way through his foes; but, hemmed in at length on all sides, he sought but to sell his life as dearly as he might. Three of his assailants had already fallen beneath his arm, when, by some unlucky chance, his sword was shivered in his grasp; a dozen weapons clashed above his head, as he fiercely grappled with his nearest antagonist, and strove to wrest his sword from his hand. All at once, he felt his horse give way beneath him, and a powerful arm, seizing him from behind, pulled him from his saddle to the earth. Half stunned by the shock, he cast a glance upwards, and saw, or thought he saw, the features of the dark Toorkoman bending over him with his raised sword; and a dim sense of treachery and disgust came over him, when the words "Be still, as you value your life!" arrested his fleeting sense—a moment of dust and darkness succeeded;—groans and execrations, the heavy sword blow, and the kick of the wounded charger, mingled dimly in his wandering ear—his brain reeled, and for a while he remembered no more.

When recollection returned, the tumult had rolled from around him, and he found himself lifted by two men, who silently threw over him a Toorkoman joobba, and placed on his head a rough fur cap. Gazing around, the still imperfect light shewed him the field strewed wit' the dead

and dying, from whom others, principally in the Toorkoman garb, were stripping their clothes and armour; and he thought, even then, he could distinguish, among the sufferers, the dress and arms of his own brave gholaums: but a voice, which he recognised for that of the dark Toorkoman, recalled his ideas to himself with these words—"In the name of God! khan, mount this horse, and come with us—a moment more, and it may be too late!" Instinctively, the khan grasped the mane, and was soon seated in the saddle of a strong horse, though his head still swam with the effects of the blows and wounds he had received.

Following his unknown friends, they mingled for a few minutes among a crowd of Toorkomans, who appeared to be busily engaged in securing prisoners:—then gradually withdrawing, they dived into a hollow, which hid them from sight of the field of battle, and urged their horses in an opposite direction, until a turn in the high banks of the ravine more effectually concealed them. Amazed and stupified, the khan could scarce direct his horse; and his companions, observing his feebleness, took hold of his bridle-rein on either side, and pressed still faster, and further up the hollow, until they were high among the hills that inclosed the fatal valley. The hollow terminated in a low gorge, over the rugged ground of which they pushed without halt or check; nor was it until a descent of considerable length had brought them to a small meadow, green with the verdure of spring, that they relaxed their speed, and invited their charge to dismount.

Stiff, fatigued, and sore, and still dizzy with loss of blood and the stunning blows he had received, the khan could not dismount without assistance; and suffered himself, passively, to be dealt with

by his conductors as they pleased. They led him to a recess in the hill side, where the overhanging rocks formed a shade from the beams of the sun, now high and warm. Horse-cloths and cloaks were spread for him, and a leathern bottle of water was held to his lips, to slake his burning thirst. The horses being picketted in a spot where they could feed, the two guides returned to their still passive charge; and, stripping off his clothes and armour, sought for the hurts and bruizes, which they bathed with much tenderness, and bound up with such means as they possessed. Then, producing from their joals a little bread, grape-jelly, and cheese, they courteously presented him with the food. Scarcely a word was exchanged during these operations; and even when they invited him to repose with an assurance of perfect safety but an intimation that it would be expedient to pursue their way again before nightfall, the communication was made in the shortest terms. The khan, sick, exhausted, and sorrow-struck, attempted neither question nor resistance. He was in their power — helpless. Asleep or awake, his danger was the same; so, partaking of a cup of water mingled with hardened curds, which forms a cooling and refreshing beverage, he willingly resigned himself to the slumber which weighed heavily on his senses. For a while, his sleep was feverish and oppressed; and once or twice he started up in delirious alarm; but gradually he became more tranquil, and his breathing more regular; and, by the time the shades of evening began to fall, he awoke calm and free from fever, though still sore and stiff.

It was then, for the first time, that he opened his mouth, and questioned his conductor as to their intentions, and his own fate. "I am your prisoner," he said — "that is clear — I am helpless,

and at your mercy, and ye can work your pleasure with me — yet, you treat me tenderly and kindly— say, why am I spared alone of all my brave fellows? or, whither do ye carry me? If ransom be your object, name the amount; and by my head, it shall be paid with a khehut to boot, if the means of the Beyauts can do it."

"Be content, khan," replied the black Toorkoman — "we are thy friends, and we guide thee to thy home; the amount of ransom shall be named hereafter — but, for thy followers, hadst thou taken counsel from one who wished thee well, this mischance might have been avoided, and they might have been safe."

"Alas! for my brave fellows — they deserved a better fate — and I — well friend, I did thee some wrong, though, by my soul, something told me thou wert honest all the while — what then? a chief cannot always follow his own heart: but now make good thy words, and name thy reward."

"The reward, khan, may be hereafter claimed — for the present, thou art safe, and that sufficeth me — in the mean time, bismillah! prepare to march."

"But why this disguise, friend? thou art not what thou seemest — tell me to whom I owe my life?"

"Hereafter, khan, thou shalt know it; for the present, it is needless, and the time must be otherwise employed. In Allah's name, prepare: thy limbs are refreshed — thy horse is ready — the way is long, and tarrying here may be dangerous — eat of this food, and then, bismillah."

Satisfied of his security, and somewhat lightened in spirits, yet wondering at the mysterious conduct of his guide, the khan once more mounted, and followed his conductors. The remainder

of their journey was safely and quietly performed: before sun-rise, the party was far beyond all risk of pursuit, and a few hours more placed Sirafrauz Khan within sight of his own villages.

"Our duty is performed," said the black Toorkoman, as they looked down from the last height upon the cultivated land — "and now we solicit our leave. If, then, our faces are white in thine eyes, give us, I pray thee, some token of thy favour, that we may know thou esteemest us faithful."

"By the soul of my father, thou hast well deserved it," said the khan, "were it worth half my fortune — but I beseech thee stop not here, come with me to the kallah — there needs not now my word to guarantee thy safety — come, and receive my ransom — let Sirafrauz Khan have the satisfaction of knowing his benefactor, and proving his gratitude."

"The nobleness and liberality of Sirafrauz Khan are well known," replied the Toorkoman; "but our duty calls us elsewhere, and we may not prove them now — hereafter, the ransom may be claimed, and then let the khan remember Kara Yussuff Toorkoman."

"And by the head of the prophet, were Kara Yussuff to claim the third of my possessions, the demand should be cheerfully complied with, so that it imply nothing derogatory to my honour, or the welfare of my tribe. Receive this seal," continued he, taking from his finger a signet of toorquoise — "let this be a token between me and thee; and may the house of Sirafrauz be desolate, and his grave dishonoured, if the bearer of that ring ever want a welcome there!"

The black Toorkoman received the ring, and

carried the hand of the giver to his lips — "May the khan's prosperity increase! may his house prosper, inchallah!"

"May God protect you, friend!" said the khan. They separated — the Toorkoman and his companion taking the direction of the northern hills, while the khan, musing as much on the singular fashion of his deliverance and the mysterious conduct of his deliverer, as upon his late misfortune and mortifying overthrow, continued his way to the Kallah Feerozeh. On the same evening, he had the satisfaction to witness the arrival of the larger division of his followers, with the prisoners and plunder. Of the choice band that had accompanied himself, few ever returned to join their chief; for so complete had been the surprise, and so worn out were both men and horses before the attack, that escape became almost hopeless. A few, favoured by the darkness and confusion, managed to get away and conceal themselves in the clefts of the rocks, until the danger was past; the rest fell by the Toorkoman spears in the valley of the Gurdunee Hezartuppeh. It was a blow that fell severely on the pride and feelings, as well as the power of Sirafrauz Khan; for the brave men and the gallant equipage he had lost, were not easily to be replaced; nor could he forget, that however occasioned, it was through his own error of judgment, they had been sacrificed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YEILAK.

TIME, that "great mediciner," by degrees allayed the mortification and mitigated the disappointment of the Beyaut chief for his reverse in the Gurdunee Hezartuppeh. The season advanced rapidly, as spring is wont to do in Persia, and with it came new objects, new pleasures, new cares. The springing herbage of the mountains and the increasing heat of the plains, invited the erratic tribes to make their periodical migration from the low to the high regions, and the country was all in motion. The *chudder-nisheens*, or livers in tents, having struck their dark spider-web-like dwellings, with their families and property, mounted upon animals of all sorts and kinds, were seen winding along the valleys in dark lines, driving before them their numerous flocks and herds to the upper pastures: and even the more settled portion of the tribes, who live for a part of their time in villages, were sighing for the delights of their *yeilâks*.* It is a season of relaxation and

* *Cool* or summer abodes, like the *sheulings* of the Scotch Highlanders.

pleasure hailed with delight by all the nomadic population of Persia — an occasion which revives all their ancient feelings — the primitive and pastoral habits which the vicissitudes of ages have tended to unsettle, but have never eradicated. In this season, prince and khan, flinging aside the trammels of ceremony, and losing sight, for a while, of the schemes of ambition or of policy, fly to the yeilâk, where, like the shepherd-vizier of the tale, they love to re-assume their pristine rudeness and unpretending garb, and to taste the delights of simple and natural pleasures. The peasant relaxes from the severity of his labour, the simplicity of a happier age is restored, and peace and good will seem inclined once more to assert their reign.

Like others, the Beyauts of Kallah Feerozeh and its neighbouring villages prepared to quit their mud-build hovels and scorching sahrah for the dark tents and brushwood-huts of the yeilâk Sirâbeh, and the green pastures of the Koh-e-Jahetai. The day appointed by the astrologers had arrived, and the kallah and its village became once more a scene of busy preparation — but how unlike that which we had occasion so lately to describe! The sun arose in a fair and cloudless sky. Every leaf, and blade of grass, sparkled with the dew-drop which still hung upon it, and flung fragments of prismatic radiance abroad as each was touched by the genial ray. Thin blue mists floated along the hollows, curling up the sides of the hills, and veiling, with a gauzy beauty, the harsher features of the landscape. A dense fog-bank rested on the kuveer, in which was reflected the distant hills, distorted into a thousand varying forms by the strong refraction. There was an elastic fragrance in the air which imparted

a corresponding buoyancy of spirits to all that breathed it; — it seemed as if all nature was glad, and the voice of man arose in joyous accordance with the benign influence around him.

Already had the herds and flocks been sent forwards under charge of a party of the young men, assisted by their dogs; and their lowing and bleating came floating on the still air from far on the mountain. The brood-mares and their foals, with the young camels and those not employed as beasts of burthen, more carefully guarded, were still in sight; and the whole population of the village, with the exception of the few persons to be left in charge behind, all attired in the sober garb of travel, were seen busily loading yaboos, mules, and asses, with their goods and chattels, the carpets and numuds, the cooking utensils, and the whole paraphernalia intended to provide for their comfort in their mountain lodgings.

A close view of the order of march might have afforded amusement to a stranger. In one part, on the back of a bunchy camel, might be seen an aged and decrepid crone scarcely distinguishable from the rags among which she sat, bending in the weakness of second childhood, and throwing forward an unconscious gaze from her glassy eyes. Close by her side perhaps, as if in contrast, upon a shaggy yaboo, well loaded with Eeliaut huswifry, was perched an urchin scarcely four years old, holding on with feet and claws, yet quite as much at home as the most practised horseman of the party. The mother, little recking of the care which city dames require, might be seen nursing her new-born infant on the saddle of a high-trotting dromedary; while others, with offspring little older on their backs, kept equal pace on foot with the march of the cavalcade. A few ca-

mels loaded with kajawahs, ornamented with their little flags, bore the harems of some heads of families and richer individuals, and on most of the lightly-loaded beasts sat some sick or favourite one, whom rude affection sought to spare somewhat of the fatigue of a rough journey: but the greater number of all ages and sexes trudged on on foot—some carefully looking after their baggage; others, heavily armed, taking their station on the flanks to guard against attack, however remote or distant the chance.

Long was it ere the motley, tortuous line had filed from the village, and gained the mountain side; and then, and not till then, did the harem of the khan issue from the fort, partly mounted on horseback, and partly shrouded from view in kajawahs placed upon the backs of strong camels, and guarded, at a little distance, by a party of the household servants and gholaums. Last of all came the khan himself, but with less than ordinary state. His dress was such as one of his peishkhidmuts might have worn, though under it glanced the rings of his shirt of mail; a single yeduk was led by a jeloodar, but, though covered by an unpretending jhool, it boasted of the best blood of the desert. Two pages rode close behind; one carried his spear, the other his shield; and his son, the young Abbas Koolee, pranced exultingly upon a gallant Arab at his side. On a far more sober animal came the grave Meerza Ahmed, accompanied by the venerable Moollah Yussuff, who bestrode an ass of large size. A strong body of servants and armed attendants, all mounted, closed the rear; and each, in their turn, filing up the valley, were lost to the eye. In the Kallah Feerozeh there remained but a small garrison, commanded by a trusty officer; and a few of

the older and poorer inhabitants of the village remained, as customary, in their turn, to watch the crops, and attend to the interests of the community.

The Yeilâk of Sirâbeh, as we have already remarked, was situated in the Koh-e-Jaghetai, a very lofty and extensive branch of mountains proceeding from the great range of Elburz. Like these, they varied in their aspect from the arid rockyness, so characteristic of Upper Persia, to the rich verdure which, though for a short period of the year, clothes many of its mountainous districts. Rising to a magnificent height, its crests, for many months of the year, continued white in snow, which always lay deep in its cavities. The extensive line of its summit was cloven into numerous chasms, the origin of the deep ravines or rich valleys that furrowed its side, and through which flowed many a stream that lost itself in the plains, or found final issue in the wooded districts of Astrabad and Goorgaun. In more than one part, where the range attained its greatest breadth, the summit exhibited a lofty table land, above which towered the rocky and often snowy crests. Such table lands being full of perennial springs, formed the favourite chummuns or pasture-lands of the Eeliauts; for their soil was rich, and the grass, nourished by the moisture derived from fogs and dews and melting snows, grew luxuriant and sweet. Here was the place for keeping the brood mares and their foals, while sheep and cattle and other animals grazed below, or on the mountain tops around.

In one of these chummuns, surrounded by black rocks, whose tops were generally clothed in curling mists, there was a little lake of the most translucent water, which reflected the dark hills and deep

blue sky, or sparkled in the curling wind, dashing its tiny waves upon a beach of brilliant sand, like a mirror set in frosted silver. It was the reservoir of numerous springs, which maintained the verdure of the meadow; and their united waters escaped at one end in a little stream, which from above looked like a silver thread winding through the green pasture, until bursting through a barrier of rocks, it threw itself over a ledge into a hollow so dark and deep, that the eye, gazing from above, could not discern the bottom.

It was from this chummun and its little lake — the *head of the waters*, as it was called, that the Yeilâk took its name *Sirábeh*. For the greater part of the year it was a placid and a soothing, though a lonely spot; for the only sounds were the screams of the eagle or the cry of the hawk, as it hovered over a covey of the mountain partridge; and the only forms that intruded were those of the timid antelope, which sought in it a secure retreat, or of the magnificent mountain sheep, as he looked from the top of a rock, tossing his twisted horns aloft, in relief against the blue sky. But at the season when occupied by its erratic masters, it exhibited a more interesting and pastoral picture. The rocky elevations that rose here and there above its bosom, as well as the margin of the lake, were then occupied by groupes of the black tents, around which the meadow swarmed with animals of every description. Each spring and fountain had its little camp, while the pasture far and wide teemed with life and animation. The women thronged to the clear basin, with their water vessels; the men lounged by its side, or stretched themselves in groupes upon the bank, smoking their pipes and telling their tales; while the children threw themselves wantonly into its flashing waters, with scream

and roar, and childish merriment. The air teemed with harmonious sounds, as the earth did with life and beauty.

But the summer dwelling of the khan was not in this pleasant plain. The chasm which engulfed the rivulet that issued from the lake, and which received the waters of many other streams, was surrounded by a circle of lofty peaks and serrated ridges, which externally terminated in grassy slopes, while their inner faces, deformed by precipice and scaur, sunk abruptly into the recesses of the dark abyss. It was a black and frightful hollow, held in awe and dread by all the country round. It had obtained the name of *Ghaur-e-Ghôl*, or the cavern of the Ghoul, and few, if any, were acquainted the mysteries of its recesses. Its accumulated waters, escaping with din and roar, made their way through a narrow fissure into a deep and very rugged ravine, the lips of which were rough with stunted wood, among which a few large trees, the remains, probably of some primæval forest, stood out conspicuous. In a dell, not far from this chasm, and which opened with striking wildness into the great ravine at some distance below, might be seen a small collection of huts, thatched with grass or brushwood, and surrounded with a rude fence of wooden stakes. Tents of various shapes were scattered around the huts, and the number of people continually flitting to and fro among them, announced the dwelling of some important personage. Behind was scattered a wood of stunted oak-trees, and in front, and at one side, rose a groupe of noble walnut-trees and chinars.

A spring which issued from the ground in a stream, copious enough to have turned a mill, brawled down the dell, hidden here and there by fringes of willows, and wild plum or other bushes.

Further on were seen the intricacies of the ravine, with its rocks and jutting angles, sparingly sprinkled with wood; and far beyond, the eye might lose itself in the long retiring plains and blue summits of other branches of the Elburz. Such was the Yeilâk of Sirafrauz Khan; and here, upon the second day, did he and his tribe assemble, to avoid the scorching heats of summer.

It may not be known to all our readers that the population of Persia has, from the earliest known periods, been divided into two classes, the fixed — that is those who permanently dwell in cities or villages, and do not change their dwellings; and the Eeliaut or wandering, which consists of the tribes who, to a greater or less degree, are given to dwell in tents, and who change their abodes within certain limits according to season and circumstances. These tribes were originally nomadic, inhabiting the plains and wilds of Tartary —shepherds by hereditary occupation—plunderers from cupidity—and warriors, and subsequently conquerors by necessity and growing ambition. Driven from their original haunts by the pressure of other tribes, they invaded their weaker neighbours, and, at various periods, fixed themselves on the comparatively fair plains of Persia. There, the greater number of the invaders maintained the manners of their forefathers, modified according to circumstances by contact with the conquered, while their chiefs, even when they became kings and princes, delighted in their ancestral habits, and resumed them as often and as far as occasion permitted. In their yeilâks, particularly, as we have already said, chiefs and khans forgot the austere form of court or city ceremonial, and resumed their original, simple, and patriarchal character. Their women, particularly of the lower and middle orders,

who, though probably superior in virtue and sense of honor to those of the cities, are at no time held under much restraint, roam there free and unchecked, without an apology for the envious veil; and even the harems of the chiefs are often left without any other control than that of their own discretion. Often would these ladies, delighting in the liberty of the yeilâk, wander freely among the green pastures, insist on taking part in the labours of the dairy, or, mounting the horses before the door, show their dexterity in horsemanship by galloping up the steep hills or scouring along for miles, upon the grassy plains.

Such was the case in the Yeilâk Sirâbeh, and even Leilah, depressed as her spirits had long been from her lover's absence, suffered herself to be cheated of her sorrow, and mingling in the amusements and frolics of the ladies of her tribe, relaxed into something of the gaiety that breathed around her. In company with her old nana, and attended by Noor Bukhsh, or some other of the young women of the ooloos, she wandered among the hills and pastures, inhaling health and increasing in beauty, nor did she rest without exploring every curious and interesting spot in the neighbourhood.

One only of these remained to be examined, and that was the chasm of the Ghaur-e-ghôl, which, as we have observed, was held in so much dread by the neighbouring inhabitants, that few ever ventured near it, particularly after nightfall, and many were the tales which were related of dreadful accidents which had happened to presumptuous intruders. It did not appear, however, that these had any powerful effect upon Leilah. Her timidity, probably, was not of a superstitious character, or curiosity was in her the stronger impulse of the two. It is certain, at least, that after hear-

ing them, she conceived a greater desire to visit the place than ever, and used every endeavour to induce her nurse to accompany her there. But the old woman was far from consenting to such a proposal—"Wullah! light of my eyes," said she, "have your senses departed, that you think of approaching the den of Shaitaun itself—or do you wish to give your blood to be drunk, and your bones to be craunched by the gins and deeves of that unblest hole? Illah-il-Allah! God forbid!"

"Aye, nana, that is what you always say," replied Leilah, laughing, "I have heard enough of these terrible demons, but I wish to know who has ever seen them?—none ever goes near the Ghaur, by your account of the matter."

"Allah—Allah! what words are these, child? who ever sees gins or deeves now o'days?—yet every one knows they exist—are they not continually doing mischief to the sons of Adam?—dont our moollahs tell us to beware of them?——don't all our kissagoes tell us stories of their power and their freaks?—dont all the books of the meerzas speak of them—is there a dervesh or a fakeer who wont tell you that he has met with ghosts and ghôls by the hundred? and can you doubt that they are in the Ghaur-e-ghôl itself—you might as well doubt the holy koraun itself—blessed be him that gave it!"

"Well, well, nana, no doubt there is much truth in all these things—and the authorities you have named are very convincing; yet still I should like to know something about this Ghaur, before I give it up to the devils—how could they be so near us and we know nothing of the matter?—I never heard of their doing any mischief in the yeilâk."

"No—God forbid, my child—when no one goes near the trap, none can be caught in it—who

ever dares to run the risk of what may befal him there? Were any one to do so, soon would they find out the truth."

"Aye nana, so they would, and I suspect I know as much about the matter myself, as most of them that talk of it."

"You, my soul! in the name of Allah, what can you know about it? — God help the child, she is crazy!"

"Not at all, nurse; just listen to me. The very last time we were here, when I was climbing the hills with little Meeraunee and her brother, we found ourselves high among the black rocks above there, without thinking where we had got to, when all at once we came upon the edge of a dark hollow, and saw a mist, and heard a great roaring sound; and I crept forward to the edge, but my head turned round so, that I could scarcely get back again. It was a grand and fearful place — but, as for ghôls, or gins, or deeves, I saw none — yet, ever since that time, I have longed to see it again."

"Punah-be-khodah! my soul, what a wonderful tale! Never a word of all this did I hear before, though — how happened this, my child?"

"Oh, nana! I was a little frightened at the time, so I said nothing about the matter, and afterwards I forgot it, till we went to Mushed — and then — and then, you know other things put it out of my head, nurse. But I am determined now to see it again, and you shall go with me, nana — won't you?"

"Allah-il-ullah! God is great — what I, child? May Allah forbid! I venture not to seek for either ghost or devil — ugh! I shudder to think of it. Giddy? frightened say you? little strange in that, indeed — the wonder was that you were not laid

hold of by some great bony hand, and drawn into the gulf — you see the devil had begun to turn your head already."

"Aye, but my head is not so easily turned, nurse, and I am older now than I was then; and I must see more of the Ghaur, were it only to shew that I am not a silly coward."

"Stafferullah! coward or not, you are out of your right mind, to think of running after gins and shaitauns in such a mad fashion — by the khan's head, I will tell him to lock you up, my pearl, if you think any more of such vagaries."

"By the khan's head, nana, you shall do no such thing; my father is not to be troubled with my vagaries, nor am I to have my little secrets told — but, after all, tell me plainly what you apprehend. I am not an infant to fall over rocks, or into holes; and who ever heard of ghôls or gins in broad daylight? but give me good reason why, and I may give the thing up."

"Allah-il-ullah! good reason! why who can tell what ghôls and gins may do by night or day, especially if one goes to their very dur-khaneh? — didst never hear the story of the desert-ghôl of the black rocks, child? that of itself might serve as a warning."

"I never heard it, nana — by your soul, tell it to me," said Leilah eagerly, seating herself on the bank; and the nurse, who desired no better, took her place at a little distance, and began as follows:

"In the ballook of Damghaun, on the borders of the great Deria kuveer, there is a cluster of dark rocks, which rise abruptly from the salt-marsh, distant more than four fursungs from any village. They are perfectly void of vegetation, black and scorched-like, full of holes and caverns, which, from the bones of animals strewed about, are

manifestly the dens of beasts of prey. But it is said that, in some of the deeper caverns, may be seen bones of a different appearance, and larger: these, it is asserted, are the remains of men, which a terrible ghôl, who inhabits the place, has from time to time seized, or decoyed thither to feed upon. The place is held in abhorrence throughout the country; and, although the cattle of the nearest villages are sometimes tempted by the salt grass, which springs here and there in the kuveer, to wander towards them, scarcely any of their owners will venture in that direction for the purpose of seeking them or bringing them back.

"It happened that a certain reish suffeed, of a village named Omerabad, who had a large flock of very fine fat-tailed sheep, began to find an unaccountable diminution in their numbers. His two sons, Hussun and Allee, both fine youths, and perfect lion-killers for boldness, came one day to their father, in great consternation, and said. 'May your house be prosperous father, please God—but here is a wonderful thing—here is our substance daily wasting away, and none can tell how!—behold, last night, two more of the fattest sheep have been carried off—and we have, both Allee and I, been all over the hills, and neither skin nor wool, bones nor carcass can we find. If wolf or *keftar** had taken them, we should have traced him to his hole ere now; but nothing can be seen—we are the keepers—our faces are blackened—say, father, what more can we do, for we are helpless!'

"The reish suffeed, smitten with vexation, remained silent with the wrinkles of perplexity upon his brow, and the finger of astonishment in his

* Hyena.

mouth. There was, sitting near him in a corner at the time, a poor fakeer, who had listened to the story with attention. After the reish suffeed had remained for some time silent, the fakeer opened his mouth, and said, 'I would humbly represent that it is highly probable the thief of these sheep may be the ghôl of the black rocks. It is well-known that these demons, when human flesh is not easily procured, satisfy their carnivorous appetites with the fattest of the flocks and herds they can lay hold of.'

"'God is great!' said the reish suffeed—'no doubt this may be the case—but how are we to know the truth? After all, we are Mussulmauns; and even a ghôl should not be unjustly accused—and even if we discover him to be the thief, how are we to put a stop to his depredations?'

"'Aye, truly, that after all is the point,' said the son—'what's gone is gone: it is what remains we must look after. Allah! a Toorkoman chappow is nothing to this ghôl—they are upon us and off—*zud*—*ruft*—a blow and away—but this infernal thief! it is a continual gnawing at the liver—say, O fakeer, where is to be the end!'

"'I would represent,' said the fakeer, 'that a ghôl is not like other thieves: he is strong and cunning, as well as voracious, and great wariness must be used in opposing him; otherwise, Allah-il-ullah! we may find our own heads in the gutter! But, one thing I will propose—I have in this place three brethren, all holy men; wise, moderate, and great haters of ghôls and gins—we shall watch where the sheep are kept—your sons may do the like—and, inchallah! we shall not be long of discovering the thief.'

"The honest elder was delighted with the proposal; he fed the four fakeers with good pillau,

distributed alms among them, and waited with implicit confidence the result of the night's arrangements. Well, daughter, the night came; the fakeers assembled, and each, with the two young men, took up their stations where they judged it best for the purpose in hand. Midnight was scarcely passed, when one of the fakeers uttered a loud cry, and gave the alarm; and, on coming up, the young men found he had been joined by another of his companions. Both were in great consternation — one assured them that he had been all of a sudden surprised by seeing a huge dark looking figure passing his post, with a sheep thrown across his shoulders, in the direction of the sahrah; and the other swore, wullah! billah! that he had caught a glimpse of the eyes, and that they looked like red-hot cinders, in the middle of a blue flame.

"This was certainly conclusive against the ghôl — the sheep were counted next morning; another of the fattest was found missing, and the two youths returned to their father, with their fingers in their mouth and ashamed. But Hussun, the eldest, who was the boldest of the two, resolved to watch the flock himself, without uttering a word to any one; and he concealed his person in such a manner that in the dark it would be impossible for mortal eyes to discover him.—Allah knows where he got the courage, but for two whole nights he persisted; and on the second, while he lay hid behind some stones, he saw a figure, accompanied by a dog, approach the spot. The dog crept on in silence, until near enough to seize on one of the sheep, when the figure stooped, and throwing the struggling beast across his shoulders, walked swiftly away. Hussein's hair stood on end, daughter, when he thus saw the ghôl in person; but then the thought struck him that it

might be some other thief as well as the ghôl; so plucking up courage, he rose from his hiding-place, and followed it down almost to the sahrah, where it seemed to vanish amongst some ruined walls; and he being alone, ventured not to search further.

"In the morning Hussun spoke to his brother Allee, declaring all he had seen; and the suspicion which had entered his head that, after all, the ghôl might not be the thief. They then spoke to their father, who said he would consult his friend the fakeer; but in the meantime, Allee, somewhat shaken by the opinion of Hussun, agreed to watch with him for some nights. They were not long kept in suspense; for on the second night, the same scene took place as before. Up rose Hussun and Allee together, but in their haste they ran against each other, and stumbled over the stones, so that they lost ground; but recovering themselves, they ran as hard as they could after the ghôl, and were led by it as before, to the ruins where Hussun lost sight of it. 'Ahi pider soochteh!' cried Hussun, who was foremost, 'thou shalt not escape me this time!' and he plunged in amongst the broken ground, and disappeared so suddenly, that Allee stopped short in amazement. Hideous groans and yells then assailed his ear, which frightened him so much, that, though he was as brave as a lion, child, away he ran, thinking no more of Hussun or the sheep, and never stopped till he reached his own house.

"Next day, daughter, both the father and the son, plucking up heart, for shame, set off to seek for the unfortunate Hussun. They found him, indeed, but in a woeful plight — wounded and bruised — unable to move without assistance. It was not until he had recovered a little that he could give any account of what had befallen him.

He shuddered fearfully when they spoke to him about the sheep or the ghôl; but at last he told them that, on entering the ruins, he was set upon by two gigantic forms with massy clubs, who knocked him down in a twinkling. That when he came to his senses, he found himself borne swiftly along, whether through the air or on the earth he could not tell; but that, in a time incredibly short, he was thrown down at the entrance of a cavern, which he knew to be one of those in the black rocks, and a terrible voice thundered in his ear — 'Child of Adam! thy name, and that which is engraven on the talisman on thy arm, for this time save thee — but receive this in token of the danger of meddling with ghôls or gins!' With that, daughter, the clubs again fell to work, and, although he saw not those who wielded them, he felt their heavy blows in every limb. After an hour's hearty bastinadoing, he was once more snatched up, borne swiftly as before through the air, and thrown all of a heap upon the spot where he had been found by his father and his brother. — What think you of that, my child?"

"Allah! what a strange story!" exclaimed Leilah, half terrified and half diverted by the narrative: "and what became of the ghôl — did he go on eating up the poor man's whole flock?"

"Why no, daughter — by the mercy of Allah, the elder was delivered from that distress."

"And how, pray, nurse?"

"Why, in truth, my daughter, except that it was from the goodness of Allah, they never very well knew how it happened: but it chanced that, only two days after poor Hussun's adventure, Muhubut Khan, the governor of Daughaun, stopped at the village, and, hearing of the story,

sent for the old man to relate it from first to last. The khan, it is said, laughed a good deal while he heard all that had happened, and expressed a strong desire to see the fakeers who had advised the sons to watch the ghôl: a furosh was sent to bring them, but, unluckily, the whole of them had quitted the place only the day before. 'So much the better,' said the khan, laughing; 'may God protect you, old man, and increase your wealth; — keep away these lazy scoundrels of fakeers from nestling about the village in future, and I will insure your sheep from ghôls.' Nobody quite understood what he meant, daughter, but sure enough the old fat-tails were ever after left in peace."

"Strange enough!" said Leilah, musing on the old woman's tale. But it had disappointed her — it had none of that deep enthralling interest she had expected; and its effect, being rather ludicrous than solemn, by no means operated as the nurse desired. She ceased persuading the nana to accompany her — but her own resolution to explore the place was rather confirmed than shaken.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAVERN OF THE GHOUL.

Soon after this, one morning, after the hour of prayers, when the different members of the household had betaken themselves each to their respective avocations, Leilah, in accordance with the resolution we have mentioned, took her favourite attendant Noor Bukhsh, and, having coaxed her brother Abbas Koolee, to abandon his designs against the mountain partridges, set out under his protection to examine the place which had so highly excited her curiosity.

The path was, for some distance, the same as that which led to the upper valley and the chummun; and, on the way, they met numbers of the people proceeding to the khan's dwelling, but to none of these did they think proper to disclose the object of their expedition. At length, having nearly attained a point where the path struck up a rocky acclivity to their right, and, being somewhat at a loss how best to cross the ridge upon their left, they stopped an old man with a silver beard, who gazed on them with astonishment, as they propounded to him their purpose and their difficulty.

"The Ghaur-e-Ghôl!" echoed he, with uplifted hands, and widely-opened eyes—"la illa-il-ullah! And what, my children, can such as you have to do with that unsainted place?"

"Why, father?" said Abbas Koolee—"what ails the place?—what has it done to deserve the abuse you give it?"

The old man regarded them with a benevolent but bewildered gaze. "My children, ye are surely not of this place, else ye would never ask the question—perhaps, ye belong to the family of the khan?"

"We do so, father, and we are curious to see the wonders of Allah—it is said there are few things stranger or more extraordinary than this Ghaur—"

"Strange! What shall I say?—it is the father of strange places: it is a wonder—but fit only for devils to look upon, or those who fear not devils—and surely ye are none of these?"

"May God forbid, father!—we are neither the one nor the other, yet we desire to see the place. We are mussulmauns—alhumdillah! But if there are wonders that ye know of, by your head, father! tell us of them—my soul burns till I know."

"There are few of the dwellers of this mountain, my children, or of the Eeliauts that frequent its pastures, who know not something of the Ghaur-e-Ghôl—yet why should ye seek such knowledge? Seventy long years have I lived in the valley below, and not seven times in that whole period have I heard the questions ye have put to me this day."

"By your soul, then, answer them, father!" interrupted the impatient youth—"why should men fear the Ghaur?—is it true that it is the abode of a ghôl?"

"Say, rather, that it is the very kallah of ghôls,"

replied the old man. "We are told by some that it is on record as one of the sealed entrances which conduct to the subterraneous fire that glows under the snows of Kâf, and into which Solymaun ibn Daood cast the rebellious gins; and they say, that on certain days the evil spirits have power to make themselves both heard and seen. But there is a talisman engraved on a rock in a hollow of the abyss, and the seal of Solymaun is impressed thereon, so that they are restrained from ever breaking out."

"But if that be true, father, where is the danger? If they are controlled by the great seal of Solymaun, how can they come forth to hurt mankind?"

"Ah! my son, it is through his own presumption that man oftenest falls. The talisman, while undefiled, is an all-powerful safeguard—it is not proof against the influence of human guilt. When a crime is committed within the sphere of its operation, its virtue is in part suspended; and of the evil spirits, who are ever on the watch to break forth, one succeeds in escaping, and he ranges about, devouring and destroying, until, by the efforts of some holy man, he is plunged again into the abodes of fiery torture! But, alas! in this wicked world, the evil so much overbalances the good, that many of these liberated spirits are at large, inhabiting the den; for though they flit abroad under the shades of night, it is said that they return to their darkness with the light of morning."

"Strange and terrible, indeed!" said the maiden, shuddering, for the old man's solemn tone had impressed her imagination—"and are there surely some of these fearful beings now abroad?"

"Aye, many, daughter—not here alone, but

every where: yet let not the innocent fear — the impious and the infidel are alone subjected to their power. The holy name of Allah and his prophet, uttered with faith in the heart, is a sure safeguard against their malice."

"And have any of these dreadful events taken place within your knowledge, father?" said the youth — "any crime that has set loose an evil spirit?"

"Alas, my son! is evil so rare among mankind, that we need tax our memory sorely for a crime? Aye, even in these remote hills, the cry of many a foul deed ascends to the footstool of Allah! Scarce six years have passed, since two brothers, driving their flocks up this very pathway, quarrelled with each other, not far from whence we stand. High words led to angry deeds; and the elder with his heavy staff smote the younger, so that he died. Smitten with horror, as well as with alarm, he sought to hide the fearful consequences of his passion; and, taking up the body of his brother, he carried it in his arms to the brink of the terrible gulf. Well did he know that there no human eye could detect the murder; but he forgot that omnipresent eye, which seeth all things. The yells and howlings of the imprisoned spirits, which arose as he dropt the body into its dreadful grave, were heard far and near. The murderer fled appalled, and in the intervals of the madness with which he was seized, he declared that a gigantic arm, ascending from the gulf, received the corse as it fell, while a countenance, more horrible than imagination could have fancied, with glowing eyes and a mouth like the jaws of hell, rose grinning at him like a fiend; and, uniting itself to a dark shadowy figure, vanished with a laugh that shook the mountain, in a wreath of smoke. For the short time he

lived, this figure was never absent from his mind; and, in a few weeks afterwards, having escaped from his unhappy mother, he was observed proceeding swiftly in the direction of the Ghaur; and, as he never more was seen among the sons of men, no doubt remains that he became a prey to the demon, which his unholy wrath had been the means of setting loose upon mankind."

"Allah! Allah! how dreadful!" exclaimed the maiden, deeply interested and moved by the image which the old man's story had excited in her mind; and she continued musing earnestly on what she had heard.

"But, after all, father," said the youth, "it seems strange to me that no one has ever thought of thoroughly exploring this singular chasm. Has no man ever entered it? and if not, how can so many things be known of it? Have you yourself, putting your trust in Allah, never mustered up courage to look into it, and take a peep at the demons?"

"My son, I will tell the truth — our cattle and sheep, which, poor things, have no knowledge of their danger, stray often among these hills, even to the brink of the chasm. Those who know the place, very often prefer leaving such animals to their fate, to endangering their own lives or senses by approaching it too close; yet once, when I was a lad, the loss of a favourite lamb tempted me to cross the ridge of rocks in search of it. All was still and peaceful looking; and, prompted by curiosity, I bent my steps to the brink of the hollow. The snow which was melting around, and the rain which had fallen, swelled the streams that fell into it; but, whether it was the foam of the waters, or the smoke of fires, a vapour did assuredly arise, like that of a seething pot, from a depth so dark

and terrible, that my head swam round, and I almost toppled into the abyss. The rock below me overhung the hollow, so as to screen all sight of what might be below; and jutting rocks confused my view of the other sides: but, I saw that in some places there were black caverns, in others, ledges of green grass, tempting to the sheep, poor things — and shaggy wood. But, the silence and loneliness was awful: and the noise from below — no doubt it was the groans and shrieks of the damned! I was glad to creep back from the brink to which I had ventured, and never since have I seen the Ghaur nearer, than from the tops of the hills among which it lies. This is the truth — ask the whole country whether Ak Sakâl Yussuf eats dirt."

"Why should we? I believe you, father — yet, after all, methinks I the more desire to see this extraordinary place, and the talisman that holds the gins in such order — one might read the words of power!"

"God forbid, my son — God forbid you should ever be so tempted! Allah il ullah! the talisman! Who can read it? who can see it? Years of painful toil, in the mysterious language of the cabala, can alone enable man to see that which is invisible to mortal eyes — and to read or speak the words of power! The angels themselves tremble when they think of them!"

"Then, if no one has seen this talisman, who can say that it is there at all? The whole may be a story, like those of the kissagoes."

"My son, it becomes not youth to doubt the words of age," responded the old man, in a tone of some severity — "what I have now, at thy own wish declared, is that which the knowledge of ages has confirmed, and is universally believed — but

the truth of these things rests upon better authority. From times far more remote than I can remember, this Ghaur has been the abode of another being of a very different order from its demons. He was a learned and holy calundur; a man so well versed in the occult sciences, that it is said he could decipher the most powerful talismans, and that the demons obeyed his voice; and such was his extraordinary sanctity, that he had reached the fourth stage of perfection and performed many miracles. No one knew the name of this holy person: he was spoken of by all as the 'Calundur of the Ghaur.' There he made his abode; but how he sustained his life, no one could tell. It was said, that his object there was the study of that very talisman of which I told you; but one thing is certain — that he occasionally came abroad, and then the good he did was great. He healed the sick, gave charms against the *baud* * and evil eye, predicted events, gave happy hours and excellent advice to all who would receive it, and commanded universal esteem by his kindness and disinterestedness. It was this man who told me much of what I have now told you — and there was no lie in his mouth. But, for the last two years, he has not been seen; and we believe that his time of mortal probation being over, he has undergone the last beatific process of absorption into the divine essence, for which he always sighed. Reports, indeed, are said to have gone abroad, that the holy man has re-appeared, but I do not believe it—too surely we shall never again see the virtuous and venerable Calundur-e-Ghaur."

"Aajib! strange!" exclaimed the youth— "Allah! how I should love to meet that holy person! — how I should delight in becoming his

* Literally, wind — to which many rheumatic and chronic diseases are attributed.

*mureed**—he should be my *peer*.†—Oh, how I should delight to become learned in *chymia* and magic — my sword should be invisible and irresistible — and choosing happy hours for myself, I I should succeed in all my enterprises — wullah! — I might become the Shah himself!" The old man smiled and shook his head, but said nothing. "After all, I must see this Ghaur, if it be only from a distance — we came to see it, and who would give up a thing when once he undertakes it — besides, we will be prudent. — Oh, I am wonderfully prudent."

"Youth is seldom the season of prudence," said the old man, gravely — "I have declared to you the perils of the place and am blameless — if still you are resolved to take the risk — on your own heads be it — the goat-path there on your left will lead you through the rocks to a point from whence you may see the place. May God protect you, my children, and deliver you from all evil powers."— With these words the old man left them, taking his way down the path towards the lower yeilak.

The brother and sister now looked at each other for awhile in silence — the old man's words had not been without their effect on either; but Abbas Koolee, of a dauntless and more determined character, ashamed, too, of betraying even the impression that had been made upon him, at length with a resolved voice said — "Come, then, Leilah, why should we lose time? — now we know one way, we won't give it up—let us go on." Leilah, of a more timid disposition, though capable of resolute conduct, when highly excited, had been somewhat appalled by the various and mysterious accounts she had heard, and did in truth feel rather disposed to

* Disciple. † Religious instructor.

hang back; but the taunting sarcastic observations of her brother, and the shame of being the first to abandon an enterprize of her own projecting, impelled her to persevere, and forward they went.

The path, a scarce discernible track, led tortuously among some black craggy heights, to a cleft through which they passed. The roar of a torrent, which soon struck their ear, increased as they advanced, and after a few yards' further progress, they stood in rapt amazement at the prospect which presented itself. They found themselves upon a bank, which sloped to the verge of a chasm, blacker and deeper than their imaginations had conceived, and from which there issued a continuous roar, accompanied by a mist-like smoke. But the cause of both was equally hid from the view — a sheer precipice of awful height, terminating below in dim obscurity, and rising above into a fantastically shaped peak, formed the opposite side of the hollow, which, on the right-hand, was bounded by a range of high and jagged rocks. On the left it opened out into larger dimensions, until closed again by crags jutting out in succession, and hiding its communication with the lower valley. On all sides precipices arose from the black misty gulf; and enormous fragments of rock, like broken pillars or buttresses half severed from a ruined wall, starting forward midway down into mysterious vacancy, might have been taken for the shapes of fiends or ghôls struggling to escape from their prison. Huge trees, which avalanches of snow and rock had torn from the upper parts of the mountains, hung by roots or branches in the crevices; and their bleached and skeleton-like forms, bristling from the sides, added to the imposing and horrific aspect of the place. Torrents, increased by melting snow and lately-fallen rain, were precipitating themselves

in sheets of grey foam from many a lesser chasm; and the darkness and confusion, the wild grotesqueness of the rocks, and the sense of loneliness and mighty space which weighed on the beholder, shed over this remarkable hollow an air of mystery and gloom, eminently calculated to impress a superstitious people with images of supernatural terror.

Leilah and her brother surveyed this scene for a while in silent wonder, nor did they find it easy to shake off the chilling awe which, connected with the old man's narrative, it failed not to excite in their minds. That dizzy tingling of the nerves, that creeping consciousness of danger, which assails one on the brink of a slippery precipice, was mingled with a dread of something undefined that excluded for a while the perception of particulars, and permitted them only to dwell upon the great and imposing whole of the striking objects before them.

At length, the elastic mind of Abbas Koolee began to collect itself, and he examined things with more minuteness. It was obvious that the place was held in no horror by the beasts of the field, for a number of narrow tracks along the very verge of the precipice bore testimony to their nibbling the sweet grass wherever it could be reached, and the moist air and water-spray had encouraged a verdure which gave an emerald tinge in many places even to the dark rocks themselves. Cautiously following one of these tracks, which led from where they stood to a cleft in the rock, they were enabled to see a little green promontory far down in the gulf, and to which the path appeared to lead; and while gazing at this object, which was sometimes obscured and sometimes revealed by the clouds of blue vapour that drifted past from below, the attention of the young man was arrested by an ex-

clamation of alarm from his sister, who suddenly caught his arm. Following the direction of her eye, he discovered a figure, wearing the human form, standing upon the point which had just before been vacant: its strange and uncouth aspect, half-wreathed in fog, gave it an appearance so unearthly, that it was no wonder the maiden for a moment believed it to be one of those terrible beings with which the gulf was said to be haunted, actually making its escape to upper air.

Slight as was Leilah's scream, and loud as the roar arose from the cavern below, it seemed as if the creature had heard it — for it turned round immediately and cast a glance upward, and the eddy of the wind having, at the same moment, cast aside the vapoury veil, Abbas Koolee could distinguish that it was a man with a silvery beard, whose clothing appeared to consist of the skins of animals. "Ah!" cried he, "it is the calundur himself — See! Leilah, see! it is neither gin nor ghól — but the holy man himself, just as the âk sakal described him."

Leilah cast a hurried glance over the figure; but scarcely had she caught it, when another cloud of mist blew past, and hid it from her view.

"Bismillah! I must see the holy man!" said Abbas Koolee: "I must find my way to his dwelling in spite of ghôl, or deeve, or talisman — in the name of the most merciful Allah I will descend." But Leilah clung to him with all her strength, and besought him not to leave her with so much earnestness that he could not immediately escape; and, ere another minute had elapsed, the same figure was seen ascending the chasm at their feet, by a path so steep and giddy as to make them shudder, yet which the stranger trod with

an air of ease and confidence that seemed the attribute of a superior being.

Half eager and half trembling, they awaited his approach, and soon he stood before them. His countenance, which bespoke a green old age, was noble; his eye was bright and his forehead clear; a long white beard covered his breast, and white locks hung matted in profusion from his head. His body was covered with a cloak of sheep-skin, and his bare legs were shod with rude sandals of hide and thongs: the only thing he held in his hand was a long club, the lower end of which was heavy with rings and spikes of iron. Abbas Koolee in vain sought for symptoms of extreme age;—his step was firm, his muscles plump and well defined, and his person perfectly erect; his venerable beard and dignified demeaner were all that seemed to tell of the years that had been spent in pious exercises or religious self-denial.

The words of salutation and peace, uttered by the calundur in deep guttural accents, were the first sounds that broke the silence. "Children," said he, "what seek ye here?—this is no place for such as you."

"Holy sheikh," replied Abbas Koolee, soon recovering his presence of mind, "we are here in our own yeilâk — these hills belong to it: we love to roam about them, and to gaze on the wonders of Allah — we heard of the fame of this Ghaur, and came hither to judge if report had told the truth."

"If thou hast heard the fame of the Ghaur-e-Ghôl, thou must also have heard of its dangers — that it is the abode of demons — that man ventures here at peril of his life."

"Father, we are true believers — servants of Allah; wherefore should we fear the power of

demons — besides, this is thy abode — if they hurt not thee, what cause have we to dread them?"

The fire which lit up the holy man's eye, as he regarded the youth, belonged not, assuredly, to that apathetic abstraction, which usually characterizes such ascetics. "Young man," said he, "thy confidence in the Almighty is worthy of praise — yet, Allah loves not the fool-hardy. 'He,' saith our blessed prophet, 'who grasps a naked sword, shall be wounded by its edge.' When thou hast numbered one-half of my years, and hast mortified for near a century the lusts and temptations of the flesh — when thou hast held converse with the Most High, and canst look with joy for the moment that shall re-unite thy spirit to his — then mayest thou safely tempt the dangers of this unblest place — till then, be wise and refrain."

"But, father, behold in me thy devoted disciple — be thou my peer — no toil nor difficulty canst thou impose which will deter me; no danger, which I will not encounter, to attain the knowledge and the power which thou possessest."

"My power! frail child of day! Infant in this dangerous world as thou art, what couldst thou do with it? how shouldst thou know to wield it? Seekest thou to attain knowledge? Couldst thou at thy age give up the world and its vanities? couldst thou part with thy horses and thy arms — thy gay apparel and thy joyous sports? couldst thou abandon the hope of military fame and power — the fierce excitement of war — the dazzling rewards of glory — and, clothing thyself in the sackcloth of humility, and lying down in the dust of self-abasement, consent to fast and prav till the flesh faints, and the spirit fails? Thine eye betrays thee, boy — thou couldst *not*."

"Thou sayest truly, father — fasting and fatigue

I could endure — pain, wounds, privation, should be welcome — but, to abandon the joys and the honours of men, before I have well tasted of them — to forswear war, and manly sports, and military glory — that, father, I could *not* do, as thou sayest; after all, a bold heart and a sharp sword are something — our princes and pehlewans have slain their gins and deeves, and broken talismans to pieces by mere force of their arms and courage; and why might not I explore the mysteries of this cavern, by the power of a stout hand and a true heart? Tell me, I pray you, where lies the hidden talisman which holds these evil spirits in awe?"

Again did the eye of the calundur lighten with a beam very foreign to his order. "Brave boy!" said he, "courage and constancy will do much, but for this talisman, think of it no more. Seest thou yon point which overhangs that ledge beyond the tree? From that point may be seen the place where the spell is deposited, and thou wilt confess that to reach it is more than the unassisted arm of man may accomplish."

The youth sprung onwards to the spot, which was but a few yards distant; and the calundur seized the opportunity of approaching Leilah:— "Maiden!" said he, fixing on her his bright and piercing eyes — "dost thou still remember Reza Koolee? Wouldst thou hear of his fortunes? If so, be at this time to-morrow in the pass among the rocks, which leads to this place." Having said these words, he followed the young man towards the point, leaving Leilah stupified with astonishment. To her, the terrors and interest of the scene were at an end — all her faculties were absorbed in the sentence she had just heard uttered. What further passed, she knew not; and it was only her brother's voice, loudly calling on

her to return with him, that roused her from her reverie; and starting, she accompanied him homewards.

All that day, and during the succeeding night, did Leilah ruminate over the calundur's words — they were few, but contained what to her was a volume. Long had she pined for news of him, who was the cynosure of her thoughts. Never had a doubt of his truth entered her heart — That she could not have supported; yet it bore hard, very hard upon her to be so utterly deprived of all intelligence concerning him; and now, when least she dreamed of such a blessing, to find herself within a few hours of knowing all she longed, yet dreaded to hear — it was a rapture which almost overcame her — perhaps — but she dared to speculate no further.

Morning came at length; and, in spite of an almost sleepless night, Leilah arose with an alacrity which sufficiently betrayed the overwhelming interest she felt in the promised communication; nor was it until she was quitting the hut of the women *alone*, that a question arose in her mind concerning the propriety of the step she was going to take — what, indeed, was she about to do? to meet a man — a stranger! and, in a place so retired — so remote, in case of danger, from all human aid — her cheek blanched, and her step faltered, as she called to mind the old man's words, that "human crime alone had the power of unchaining the demons:" yet, could it be a crime, thought she, to inquire from a holy person about the fate of one to whom she was so deeply bound — her friend — her deliverer — her lover? Again came the startling doubt — however blameless she herself, the being who had tempted her to meet him, what might *he* not be? In place of a holy calundur

might he not even be a wicked spirit, disguised for the purpose of alluring her from home and friends, to sacrifice her to the horrid spectres of the cavern? She shuddered at the idea! But, when did ever true affection yield to the terrors of fancy? "Have devils, then, power to hurt the virtuous?" said she, mentally — "are my thoughts or wishes criminal? can gratitude, can love, be hateful in the eyes of the Most High? The doubt, itself, is surely sinful."

"Love, stronger than death," prevailed. "I will go," she said; "in the name of Allah will I proceed — under the shadow of his arm, and in mine own innocence, will I go forth, and meet that mysterious being — what interest can he have to injure me? and how, without it, can I hope to learn that which I die to know?" So, rousing her own courage, she continued to climb the hill with a swift, though still a faltering step; and, with a mind resolved, she at length reached the pass — one moment did she pause to look around — to listen to the mysterious murmur of the gulf beyond the rocks, at whose foot she stood — the next saw her figure disappear amid them, as she sprung forwards to the appointed spot. Soon did she reach it, and cast a hurried glance on all sides — looked timidly through the opening, beyond which might be caught a glimpse of the dreadful chasm —trembled — listened — but nothing was to be seen save the black rocks — no sound was audible but the sullen roar of the dashing waters. "Can he then be false?" thought she, and a chill ran through her frame at the idea — "can he have deceived me?"—"Leilah! dearest Leilah!" uttered a voice which she could not mistake — she turned, and in a moment was in her lover's arms!

We shall not insult the feelings of our readers by attempting to describe such a meeting as this,

where the ardour of mutual affection had been heightened by long absence and anxiety; nor shall we dwell upon the interesting explanations which succeeded. We need not set forth at length how Reza Koolee told his mistress, that, driven from the service of her father, and withheld by adverse fate from attempting to retrieve his own affairs, he had been forced to fly to the mountains, where sometimes with a few followers, at other times alone, he had wandered about, hovering, as a bird does round its nest, around the spot which held all that he loved. How he had watched over the interest of her father with the anxiety of a son; how he had been, by the blessing of Allah, the means of defeating one fearful attempt against his life and power; how, hearing that the khan had resolved on retiring to his yeilâk, he had been tempted to approach it in hopes of seeing and speaking with herself. How, being informed that the enemies of the khan were still actively engaged in plots for his destruction, he had sought the means of occasionally visiting the yeilâk unsuspected, and watching over the safety of her he loved. How for this purpose he had assumed the dress and character of the Calundur-e-Ghaur, an ascetic long since gone to paradise, but of whose existence, as well as of the mysteries of the gulf itself, he had been perfectly aware. All this did Reza Koolee relate in circumstantial detail, enthralling the attention of his mistress so much, that time passed away unheeded. He told her that to appeal again to the khan, whilst yet a beggar — a ruined man, without a secure home or means of subsistence — and while the mind of that chief must be impressed and his judgment trammelled by a sense of the services he had received, was a measure which he could not bring himself to

adopt. "But the hour draws nigh, Leilah," said he, "when the enemies of Reza Koolee shall be confounded, and his star shall be lord of the ascendant. The iniquities of these, my wicked relatives, are working their own downfall; — the stream of their fortune is running low, but it must have time to exhaust itself. Then, Leilah, shall thy lover advance with determined step — and Sirafrauz himself may not refuse a powerful chief, whose hands will then be cleansed from the blood of his tribe, the alliance which he could not grant to the fugitive beggar of a hostile race."

Leilah smiled through her tears at her lover, and articulated a fervent, though low-breathed "Inchallah!" as she half returned the fond pressure which strained her to his heart. They parted with an understanding that frequent meetings should take place; and the maiden, with the specious casuistry of love, reconciled this measure to her conscience by the thought that she might thus command much valuable information which her lover might otherwise find it impossible to make available for the service of the khan. So little had Leilah attended to aught beyond the delight of having her lover near her and hearing his voice, that not until he had adverted to his own disguise did she remark the alteration that had taken place in his appearance. Even then it was the darkness of his features and the meagreness of his person that principally struck her attention, and sorely did she mourn over the ravages which hardship and misfortune had effected on his noble form. The young chief smiled at her distress, and remarked that his strength was already restored by her presence, and his heart revived by the light of her countenance; yet, nevertheless, so necessary under their present circumstances was the

disguise he wore, that it still must be maintained at their meetings. Even in the remote possibility of their being observed together, suspicion would be less awakened than were the maiden to be seen in company with one in a secular garb. Accordingly they did meet as often as circumstances permitted; nor did the old nana, when she understood the case, refuse to attend her charge, even to the vicinity of the once formidable and dreaded Ghaur-e-ghôl.

In the meantime, various rumours began to reach the khan of purposed movements on the part of his enemies. For months past a greater armed force had been maintained at Mianabad than seemed requisite for the defence, or consistent with the means of its chieftain; but the dubious condition of his domestic relations might account for such precautions without imputing to him any important designs of foreign hostility.

It was known, too, that levies of Toorkomans had been for some time mustering in the neighbourhood of Semulghan, and that several aouls of the Goklans had encamped near the seat of the khan, but little alarm was occasioned by these facts; for the intimate connection now subsisting between Semulghan and Mianabad were notorious, and, it was supposed that both the chiefs had quite enough to manage at home without involving themselves in quarrels with their neighbours.

Notwithstanding all these presumptions and common-sense reasonings upon the subject, the rumours we have alluded to began to assume a more definite shape, and all pointed at some powerful attack upon the dominions of Sirafrauz Khan. Uncertain where the blow might fall, the chief, in spite of the unfavourable season of the year, took such precautions and made such dispositions for

mustering his force upon the shortest notice, as the occasion demanded from a sagacious and active leader; but no actual movement was attempted until more certain information should be received to indicate the purposed point of attack. At length it came, and in so many and such decided shapes, as left him no doubt upon the subject. The demonstration made, as he learned, upon the side of Kallah Feerozeh was so obvious, that he lost not an hour in collecting the greatest part of his force, and proceeding, by forced marches, across the hills to protect the seat of his power and family. Mustapha Beg, the captain of his gholaums, together with Meerza Ahmed and a strong well-armed party, was left to guard the yeilâk; and the young Abbas Koolee, who, exulted in such a trust, being placed under command of that officer, with strict injunctions to attend to the safety of the harem, the khan took his departure.

On the very next night a report was brought in by the kessekchies, or sentinels, to Mustapha Beg, that certain strangers had made their appearance, hovering on the heights of the chummun, or upper yeilâk, of which we have spoken, and it did not, on inquiry, appear that this was the first instance of the kind; for alarm having sharpened both the wits and the memories of interested parties, it came out that more than once, about the time of early dawn, persons had been seen wandering about, of whom no one could give a proper account; — no one, indeed, had thought much about the matter; they had been taken for peasants from the neighbouring valleys, or shepherds from the upper dasture; but no suspicion having been entertained, they had never been stopped or interrogated.

Coming, as they did, however, on the back of

more serious alarms, and in the absence of their chief, such reports had the effect of spreading anxiety and mistrust throughout the yeilâk; and the indefinite character of the danger increased the panic. Sentinels were posted on all the heights, and more than the usual precautions were taken against a surprise. The alarm was greatest in the upper yeilâk, where the largest and most valuable part of the cattle were kept; and so much did this uneasiness increase towards night, and so serious were the representations made to Mustapha Beg, that, fully assured of the chummun being the object of attack, he moved himself with the greater part of his force to the heights, leaving Abbas Koolee, with little more than a handful of men to defend the khan's dwellings.

Thus ominously did the night set in, and sleep was banished from the eyes of all; yet, as hour after hour wore away, without the dreaded disaster, mens' minds became relieved, and some retired to rest, and others met, as the day began to break, to congratulate each other, and wonder at their panic. Among the rest Leilah, who had been keenly interested in every fresh rumour, and who longed to see her lover, and consult him regarding their truth, came to the resolution of visiting the spot where their interviews usually take place; and scarce had the dawn begun to dapple the east, when, accompanied by her nurse, she mounted the hill. The two women had reached the rocky pass, and were rapidly threading it, to reach the opening that looked upon the gulf, when they were startled by a sound altogether different from the customary hoarse roar of the abyss. Shrieks and cries were distinctly heard, and Leilah looked round in horror, imagining that some of the evil spirits of the place were in truth breaking forth. But a more terrestrial and

well-grounded cause of terror soon forced her to join in the expressions of affright, which increased upon her ear, when she saw more than a dozen armed men start from among the very rocks which had so often sheltered her. That she was their object was manifest, for rushing on her in an instant, they hurried her away in spite of her efforts and her screams, and so confounded with horror was her mind, that she was utterly unable to comprehend the amount or nature of her danger. For a moment, indeed, that danger seemed likely to be averted, and even her assailants stood at fault, as a figure, half naked, half clad in sheep-skins, arose from the lip of the abyss, with shouts and yells, and wielding a massy club. Two of them were dashed in a moment to the ground, quivering in the death-agony, before they well knew they were attacked, and their leader, who had rushed forward to seize the maiden, was disabled by a heavy blow upon his steel corselet, but the calundur having lowered his club for a moment, in order to support the falling girl, the rest, at the signal of their chief, surrounded and seized them, wresting his weapon from Reza Koolee at the same moment that Leilah was dragged from his sight.

The disguise of the calundur had fallen in the the struggle, and Goorg Allee—for he it was whom the club of Reza Koolee had stricken to the ground — recognised the youth immediately. — "Dog, with a damned father! — thou chief without a tribe. Thy insolence ends here — thy luck is small — hurl him into the Ghaur, men — feed the ghôls with his carcass, and follow me! — Mashallah, the game is ours."

"Base-born dog! accursed villain! beware," said Reza Koolee, as with a gigantic effort, he burst from those that held him — though this gulf

receive me now, so sure as yon sun shines in heaven we meet again!"—with these words he cast himself over the brink of the abyss, and disappeared from the eyes of his guards, who could not suppress a cry of horror, at the sight of so desperate an act. "Allah! Allah! *Jehannum ruft ust!* — he has gone to hell!" they shouted, and supporting their wounded leader, they left the place.

Lamentable, indeed, was the condition of Leilah, as her lover disappeared from her sight, and she was borne away in the arms of the ruffians; — and melancholy was the scene which the well-ordered yeilâk presented, as she was hurried through it. At the first noise of the tumult its inhabitants had fled — all, that is to say, but the old and helpless, and those to whose charge the defence of the place had been entrusted — of the former many had been causelessly cut to pieces, while the latter had been overborne, dispersed, or made prisoners; the tents and huts had been torn down and pulled to pieces, for the sake of the little plunder they might contain, and what was not valuable enough to carry off, had been wantonly destroyed.

But the misery and mental perturbation of which poor Leilah was a prey, rendered her incapable of remarking all this ruin. After being half dragged, half carried for awhile in the arms of her captors, they lifted her, almost dead with terror, into the hands of a man who rode a powerful horse. A number of horsemen then assembled at the blast of a horn, and the whole rode rapidly down the hill. Neither the steepness nor roughness of the path had the least effect upon these hardy riders or their horses; on the contrary, it seemed as if they rejoiced in pushing furiously over the most desperate steeps, shouting every now and then with uncouth triumph, as it were, at the success of their daring

feat. All day they rode, crossing hills and plains, ascending cothuls, and scouring over gravelly slopes, until the miserable Leilah, exhausted with fatigue, shrieked aloud that she was dying, and entreated them, for Allah's sake, to halt, if it were but for a moment. But she shrieked to ears and hearts as callous as the stones over which they bounded; and her disregarded cries sunk at length, from utter exhaustion, into the low moanings of pain and weakness. About an hour before sunset, whether from feeling to her, to their horses, or themselves, or whether satisfied that they had out-reached all chance of pursuit, they stopped at a ruin, in a wide swampy plain, and lighting fires, remained there for some hours.

The moon had risen before they set forth again, and Leilah was mounted upon a spare led horse. They fastened her to the saddle, thus forcing her to keep her seat; but so utterly spent was she by fatigue and suffering, that before they had made out two fursungs, they had once more to deliver her, almost inanimate, to the charge of another horseman. In this manner night wore away — a short halt at sunrise gave her scarcely temporary relief, and the sun had reached its meridian, ere she was roused from the stupor in which she had lain some time, by being taken from the horse. All she knew was, that they had entered some town or village — houses and walls and the bustle of human beings were around her; she was delivered into the hands of certain females, who received her with a buzz of curiosity, and something of a gentler touch than she had experienced since her seizure. But little was Leilah able to appreciate either kindness or neglect; for scarcely had she been placed upon her feet, when her head swam round, and consciousness entirely forsook her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIFLED TREASURE.

When Sirafrauz Khân left his yeilâk, he pursued his way, without any considerable halt, to the neighbourhood of the Kallah Feerozeh, sending forward a few of his best mounted gholaums to ascertain the state of affairs, and to assure the garrison, should they be in distress, of the speedy arrival of assistance. In due time these messengers returned, bearing accounts very different from what he had reason to expect. They had found all in peace and tranquillity, nor had the smallest appearance of violence or intended hostility been observed.

"Aajib! very extraordinary!" said the khan: "what?—no symptoms—no rumours, even?"

"None, khan—not a word has been heard, nor an enemy seen."

"La illah-il-ullah!—have our beards then been laughted at? By the head of my father! what can it mean?"

"Allaverdy Beg represents, khan, that he knows nothing of the matter: he desires to assure you

that a regular carawul has been kept up, and that all the ketkhodahs are on the alert, but not even a horseman has been seen, except some of the Toorsheez men, who turned tail the moment they saw themselves observed."

The khan said no more, but came to a halt, and sent scouts all over the country to collect intelligence. As these scouts were returning on the following day, a party of them was overtaken by a singularly habited person, who, riding on a horse that was sinking with fatigue, made eager question regarding the position of their master's halting ground. An enquiry of this sort, from a stranger of his appearance, was not likely to meet with much attention, and the gholaums were preparing to treat him somewhat roughly, when he exclaimed, in a tone that made them start, "On your lives desist! and help me to your master's presence — life and death depend upon it — the yeilâk has been attacked, and the khan's family are captive. A horse and a guide — upon your heads be it!"

"Punah-be-khodah! thy news will scarce gain the mujdeh!" said one of the gholaums: "here, Maasoom, give the fellow your horse — ride his at leisure to the halting ground — it's a bit of good stuff, I'll warrant it: I will guide and guard him myself to the khan's feet. So — come on, friend — bismillah!"

They found the khan seated on a horse-cloth at the door of a hut, which was his head-quarters for the time. He was issuing sundry orders, and dispatching such business as came before him, yet with a mind in some perplexity, when the gholaum and his companion rode up and alighted. The chief's eye wandered, with a careless glance, over the person of the stranger, whom he took for some spy that had been seized; but the first replies

which he received to his questions were of a nature that fully roused his attention, and at once procured for the stranger the privacy which he demanded.

"Let the men be mustered—let the drum be beat, and recall all stragglers, while I speak with this person," were the orders he issued, as, bending forward on his seat, he motioned to the other to be seated. Bismillah, friend!—say on—sit down, and tell me what you know."

The stranger took the proffered seat, and said, "Now listen, khan—let your ears be opened: it is fit, in the first place, that you should know who I am—learn that, in me, you once more look on Reza Koolee Khan, the rightful chief of Mianabad, and once your faithful servant."

The khan started upright in astonishment, as if he had received a blow. "Allah kereem!—thou Reza Koolee?—can it be possible?—thou Allee Sheer gholaum?—God is great!—what a change!"

"Ah, khan! misery and anxiety bear hardly even on the young—may you never know them as I have—but they have not changed my heart—that is, as it ever has been, true to you and yours."

"Inchallah! inchallah!" said the khan, with some impatience—"but thy tidings, man—thy tidings!"

"Shortly, then, khan, they are these. Thou hast been deceived—thy beard has been laughed at: they have cheated thee into the belief that an attack, meant, in truth, for thy unguarded yeilâk, was intended for thy impregnable stronghold: thy dwelling is destroyed—thy household dispersed or taken, and—oh! that I should live to tell it—thy daughter is carried off—taken before my eyes, while these hands were bound, unable to aid her.

The blow fell upon the stern chief with a violence proportioned to his affectionate but usually unyielding nature. He struck his forehead with both hands, as if stunned with the shock, and remained for some moments unable to articulate. "Merciful God!" he exclaimed, at length!—"my daughter!—my house!—how said'st thou?"

"All—all destroyed, khan!"

"And thou, young man—how knowest thou this? Punah-be-khodah! thou didst love the maiden!"

"Love her, khan!—aye, as my heart's blood! and that I would have given for her readily. How do I know it? askest thou. Listen to my words, and thou wilt do me justice. I was on the spot, khan, watching over thine and thy daughter's welfare—I reached it at the moment she was seized by a full band of ruffians: two of them, with their chief, did I fell to the ground—but what was one to so many? I was seized, and she was borne away—I saw it with these eyes, I say. By a desperate effort, I sprung from their grasp, and escaped by as desperate an expedient, and my knowledge of the ground: I followed the party until sure of their destination, and then, without a moment's loss of time, or rest for man or beast, I straight came on to tell thee."

"And who, in the name of Allah! are the villains who have done this?—where has my child been carried? By your soul, tell me!—my heart burns!"

"The men of Semulghan and the Gocklan Toorkomans were the arrows which reached the mark; but that unblest wretch, Goorg Allee, was the hand which gave them the direction. I watched the retreating party to the Chummun-e-Baus-Kellah, on their way to Samulghan: ere now, God be her

help! the maiden is in the hands of Zekee Khan!"

"And where, in the name of Allah! were all my people? Where was Mustapha Beg? Where was the boy Abbas Koolee? Oh, God! was there none to fight for my child, of all who have eaten my salt?"

"Of thy people, khan, I can say nothing, for with no one have I spoken; neither is the fate of thy son known to me — I but tell what I saw — God is great! who knows what it has been his will to do."

"Bitter, bitter tidings! but God's will be done! perhaps — inchallah! a day may come — but what can now be done? what is thy purpose and advice?"

"I have but one word to reply, khan. — Behold me — I am ready to sacrifice my life for thy daughter — for her family — for thee! Command me, therefore — I am once more your servant!"

The khan, whose mind at the moment was agitated by perplexity and distress, bent a keen uneasy eye upon the countenance of the Koordish chief. He felt its expression, and at once determined to eradicate whatever of suspicion might be lurking in the khan's mind. "It is plain to me, khan," said he, "that thou dost not thoroughly know Reza Koolee yet; but, I can produce one testimony of his attachment and fidelity, which even thyself must admit — knowest thou this signet? rememberest thou to whom thou gavest it? hast thou forgotten Kara Yussuff Toorkoman?"

"Allah! Allah! and Kara Yussuff is —"

"Reza Koolee Khan: Allee Sheer Gholaum, Kara Yussuff Toorkoman, tne calundur of the Ghaur-e-ghôl, and Reza Koolee are all one and the same person. Love of thy daughter, and

regard for her father, have been the origin of these disguises — the khan may now be judge of his faith."

"By the holy Kaaba! the proof is sufficient! We are not dogs — thou shalt know, inchallah! that Sirafrauz Khan has a heart — Bismillah! we are ready — let us hear thy counsel, and if my daughter be recovered — but Allah! Allah! can that be? once in the wolf's den, when did the lamb escape!"

"By your soul, khan, do not speak thus — let us trust in God! inchallah! there are hopes — but let us think of the means: we must instantly mount and go back to the yeilâk — it is there we shall hear the latest news; for, there the few men I can command have orders to repair with all the information they can pick up."

"Aye — to the yeilâk let us go — my heart burns when I think of it — ah! my mind misgives me sorely — Oh! my son, art thou dead or a prisoner, that thou art not now at thy father's knees? Bismillah! let all be got in readiness, and let us mount!"

The appearance which the yeilâk presented, when the khan, and his party reached it after a rapid march, was little calculated to allay his apprehensions; for, although something had been done to restore order and remove traces of violence, still many tokens of calamity were obvious, as he approached. The flocks and herds had been brought together into a narrow space in the upper yeilâk, in order that they might be more fully under the eye of their owners, who watched them with swords girt on, and bow and spear, prepared to resist any repetition of attack. The inhabitants were huddled together in knots; the men conversing earnestly, the women sitting quietly with an aspect of de-

pression, or going about their household concerns with the tardy step of persons weighed down with sorrow. The tents, which had been sparsely scattered over the valley, had been brought into large camps together.

These, however, were but symptoms of remaining alarm. It was beneath — nearer his own home, that the heart of the khan began to be harrowed by visible marks of devastation. Of the numerous huts and tents that had accommodated his establishment, but few remained entire; the rest were scattered in fragments around. The bodies of the slain had been removed from view, or interred; but over the carcasses of the cattle, slaughtered in wanton mischief, the vultures still hovered, or sailed away to the black cliffs of the Ghaur-e-ghôl, where, from their numbers, they seemed to have found a feast. The lamentations that burst from the remaining dwellings, proclaimed the sorrow that reigned within them; they struck like a knell upon the heart of the anxious khan — alas! they were omens too faithful.

The truth now burst upon him in all its dreadful extent: not only had the wretched father to mourn his daughter — his son, his only son had been missing since the morning of the attack, and no tidings of his fate had been received: the only hope remaining was, that as his body had not been found among the slain, he might be living, though a prisoner. The banou, by accident, had been absent with some of her attendants, at a neighbouring aoul, at the period of attack; but many of the women of the harem were missing; some of the old were found dead or mangled, and the nana had returned severely bruised in body, but still more agonized in mind, at the loss of her darling child. Of the young, some, doubtless,

had shared the fate of their mistress, and were carried into slavery.

The hardy and proud, but affectionate nature of the khan, was shaken to its centre by this calamity. Kind and affable to all his dependents, but devoted to his family, his very heart seemed crushed; and the glad prospect which once smiled around him was blasted at a blow with utter desolation and barrenness. For a while, he was totally overcome; but at length, by a powerful effort, having resumed his self-command, he sternly questioned Mustapha Beg, the officer who had been left in charge, regarding the event which had befallen the yeilâk in his absence.

"In the name of God, man, speak! tell us what news is this? what neglect hast thou been guilty of? what dust hast thou suffered to fall on thy head? We trusted in thee, as in a brave and faithful servant, who would watch for the safety of my family, and fight till death in their behalf. Say, then, how is it that I find my family carried away captive, or slain? my property pillaged, and my dwelling destroyed, yet thou and thy people safe and untouched? Speak, O man! what demon hath shut thy eyes, and turned thy heart to water?"

"Thy servant would represent that he scarcely knows what to say," replied the Beg, his sturdy form trembling with real distress, as he stood before the agitated khan—"his *tukdeer* failed him—the eyes of his judgment were darkened, and thus he stands this day before his master, with confusion of face and grief of heart; nevertheless, he swears by the head of the khan, and by his own soul, that his zeal was never diminished, and that he strove to perform his duty as a true and faithful servant."

"Inchallah! inchallah! so may it be," said the

khan, somewhat moved by his visible distress, "but state, then, how all this happened."

"I beg to state, then, for the khan's information, that on the day when the presence left the yeilâk, reports were made to your servant that Eeliaut stragglers were seen hanging about as if they were reconnoitering with some evil purpose; and, as rumours of still larger bodies being in the neighbourhood increased towards nightfall, your servant doubted not that the cattle and mares in the upper yeilâk were in danger, and that the marauders hoped, in the khan's absence, to carry off the prize. As for the august residence — when was a yeilâk chappowed but for its cattle? — the dwellings your servant conceived to be in no danger. Thus was he deceived, and induced to take the troops, with which he had been entrusted for the general defence, away to the point which to him seemed in danger. The fact turned out otherwise; — the upper yeilâk remained secure — the attack was made below, and thus your servant's face is blackened in the sight of his master, and his head is covered with the dust of disgrace. What can he say more?"

"But in the name of Allah, man, how came it that the villains were not pursued as soon as the mistake was discovered? — when the cry of distress arose from below, why didst thou not rush down from the hills?"

"I beg to represent, that the same system of deception which had misled thy servant during the previous day and night, was continued in the morning — stranger horsemen by twos and threes were seen hovering about the heights, and these, when pursued, retreated in such a direction as to decoy my people from the true point of attack. Thus were many of my best mounted men en-

gaged, and, when the fugitives from below came and declared the truth, few remained fit for the duty of hot pursuit. The khan had the best of the horses with himself — others were drawn away after the strangers — with the rest we pushed down the hill; but it was already too late — our enemies were admirably mounted, and must have retreated in several bodies, for we were distracted by the different reports of their course. At length, afraid of committing a similar error to the first, and, dreading that more mischief might be done in my absence, we returned. I have no more to say — God is great — thy servant is in your hands."

The khan groaned — again did he hide his face and remained for a while silent — then, casting his eyes around upon the scene of sorrow and destruction, a flush of mingled passion overspread his countenance.

"Dost thou also believe that the enemy were Semulghanees?"

"There is no doubt of it, khan — two of them were killed, and another found near the place insensible from his wounds. The bodies of two Goklans were also discovered not far off — they had dropped in the retreat — inchallah! the villains were not unopposed. By your soul, khan, resistance had been made — but, what can I say, they were many, we were few; — and yet, not a few of our friends are gone to paradise! — yes, by the salt of the khan, they fought bravely."

"And my son! — Abbas Koolee!" said the khan, speaking with difficulty.

"Khan, thy servant saw him not. What statement shall I make? — the khanzadeh must be alive, for no trace of him was found in the yeilâk. For the rest, it is to be feared that he is a prisoner — inchallah! he is safe."

Another cloud of painful expression flitted across the countenance of the khan, and convulsed his features — as the whirlwind darkens and disturbs the lake: but again it passed away, and, with his customary stern serenity, he continued his enquiries. But, alas! what more could be said — what worse or what better could be known? — an error, a fatal error, had been committed, but the past could not be recalled; — all that remained was to discover and apply the remedy.

The first impulse of the khan, writhing under the anguish of his loss, would have been to muster his forces, by calling out every armed man he could command, to march on to Semulghan before they should have intimation of his approach. But it needed only very short consideration to point out the inexpediency of such a step. The serious loss he had so lately sustained on his return from Seradeh had greatly weakened his strength, so that, though quite able to repel aggression, he could scarcely hope to succeed in an enterprize so desperate as that of attacking a powerful enemy at a distance, and one, too, who must have laid their account for such a possibility when first they planned their bold attempt upon the yeilâk. Open and declared war was therefore rejected.

Alike uncertain and hazardous were the chances of succeeding in a surprise. The character of Goorg Allee Beg, the planner and executer, no doubt, of the late outrage, was too well established for circumspection to leave a hope of eluding his vigilance, or of carrying so strong a place as Semulghan by a coup-de-main, however well conceived or boldly attempted. On the other hand, little hope could be entertained of negociating, to any purpose, with a chief and a minister who had betrayed so rancorous a spirit of resentment, and

who now held in their own hands the only consideration which might have tempted them to terms — the sole object of so much fraud and violence.

Many a scheme was formed, many a project discussed — but all were so palpably impracticable as almost instantly to be dismissed. The fever of anxiety and rage which possessed the minds of all assembled, obscured their judgments, and made useless their deliberations. It was not until this tumultuous impatience had worn itself out, that Reza Koolee besought the chief's attention.

"It is apparent," said he, "that this is not the time when force can be available — and stratagem is hopeless when the eyes of the enemy are open. Delay is painful; and the khan must be aware that if to him it is anguish, to Reza Koolee it is death! — yet where is the remedy? The hunter rushes not straight towards his game — he steals along with patience and caution, keeping out of view until he reaches the due point, and then he springs upon it. The drugs of the physician may sometimes give more pain to his patient than the disease they are meant to cure, but it is a wholesome pain and tends to health and comfort. Let us, then, take patience for a season khan, and inchallah! something ere long will occur to direct us. Before evening some of my people may arrive with tidings; if not, I will myself set out upon the scout. Remain, I entreat you, in this place; let your preparations be secret and energetic; and, God is great! inchallah! the event will yet fill our hearts with joy."

The Koordish chief then took his leave, and repaired to the place he had appointed as a rendezvous for his men; nor had he waited long before a horseman made his appearance.

"Welcome, Raheem," said he, impatiently—"thou hast tarried long—hast thou ridden far?"

"Thy servant fed his horse last evening in the chummun of Semulghan."

"And what news from thence?"

"I would state that the fortress of Kallah Khan is full of armed men, and the tents of the Goklans swarm about the walls of the town. Had it not been for the dress I wore, there had been no escape."

"And couldst thou hear anything of the prisoners?"

"But little: the bustle and rejoicing in the kallah, was a proof that they thought highly of their success, and people talked of some women having been brought in. Several parties had arrived, all weary and jaded, but few particulars were known: to ask would not have been convenient, and, for fear of doing wrong, your servant returned to tell what he had seen."

"It is well—where is Jaffer?"

"Gone, sir, to meet the Meerza, for whom he has tidings I understand."

"Good—is my horse ready in the hollow?"

"Be chushm—"

"Good, it is well—go thou to the yeilâk above, there,—find out Sirafrauz Khan: tell him that Reza Koolee has set out in his service. Rest and feed thy horse, and then repair to the Hauze-e-khatoon, near the Dehineh Derksh—there thou wilt find me, or there await my orders."

"Be chushm!" replied the man, as he rode off; and Reza Koolee, having dismissed his followers, proceeded to a recess in the rocks beneath the Ghaur-e-ghôl, which he reached by a difficult path; and taking thence his arms and Toorkoman disguise, he sought his horse. The noble animal, in

the highest condition, and of the best Attock blood, lay concealed in a hollow of the ravine, and whinnied with joy at sight of its master, who, having bound up his disguise with the horse-cloth upon his crupper, mounted and took the way to the dwelling of his friend, the Meerza, at the Yeilâk Ildooz. He reached the place without interruption before morning broke; and the Meerza, accustomed to such sudden calls, was soon beside him, ready to answer his eager inquiries.

"Has Jaffer arrived?" was the young chief's first question.

"He has," replied the Meerza.

"And his news?"

"Are something — I wish they were more precise — but it is a difficult and dangerous service. That the young khanum is in the harem of Zekee Khan, is the only certainty — there is a report too of the khan's son being taken, but their party seems to have come in piece-meal, and probably their Toorkoman friends have played false — discontents are talked of; the khan is in a passion they say, and swears vengeance because some of the prisoners and plunder have not reached the fort — *they*, on the contrary, grumble because they have not had plunder enough — God knows the truth."

"But how does all this appear?"

"Why Jaffer, you know, is half a Semulghanee — he knows every hole about the place; and has wit enough to keep his own counsel. He has some grudge against the khan and his friend Goorg Allee, who, he says, made him worse than a dog — and fortunately, no one knows of his connection with me — so he mixed with the crowd in the Bazaar and heard talking enough. The calleeoon is a grand promoter of gossip — he furnished tobacco,

and so ready were their tongues that he scarce needed ask a question."

"And did Goorg Allee return to Semulghan with the party, does he know?"

"No — it seems Goorg Allee was hurt in the attack upon the yeilâk, and found it hard enough work to get to Mianabad, where pressing business is said to have called him — inchallah! it may work in our favour, but I have no accounts yet from thence."

"Inchallah! but that is good news, Meerza — When Goorg Allee is absent, the star of Zekee Khan is dim and his fortune droops — it is in his absence we must work, if we would do so with effect — and discontents prevailed, you say?"

"Assuredly, so the tale goes — many even of the chiefs spoke openly enough—and Jaffer heard it proclaimed that a reward would be given for the missing captives, especially a slave girl, Noor Buksh. It was said there had been great enquiry made about her from the underoon, and that any one bringing her to the dur-khaneh, should be well rewarded. The greedy Toorkomans pricked up their ears at this, and swore by their heads they would seek the girl and find her, if it cost another ride to the yeilâk. But the khan promises better than he pays — even this affair may increase the flame. The town is full of soldiers, that eat the country up, and the Toorkomans, if not well paid, will help themselves."

The young chief mused for awhile upon the information he had heard, and seemed to ponder it deeply. "Meerza," said he at length, "let Jaffer ride as soon as possible to the Hauze-e-Khatoon, he will find there Raheem, my jeloodar: let both await my coming — they can conceal their horses

in the hollow to the right. My sister is still at the village?"

"Undoubtedly, khan — she waits your orders there."

"It is well. I must see her forthwith. Meerza, if aid be required, Cossim shall be the messenger."

"May I enquire what is your purpose?"

"At this moment, Meerza, my lips must be sealed; even to you I may not declare it — you shall soon know all — God is great! — My horse has been fed? so, hither with him — may God protect you, Meerza," and springing on the back of his charger, the young chief was out sight in a few moments.

CHAPTER IX.

A HAREM SCENE.

When Leilah recovered her senses she found herself in a small room fitted up with but slender attention to comfort, stretched upon a mattrass and surrounded by four women. One of these was an old hag, whose Toorkoman features gleamed with an expression of devilish severity, but whose dress announced her to be of some consideration. Another was also aged, but of a less discouraging countenance, and had the usual appearance of those *gees-suffeeds* or duennas, that are found in all harems: the others were slave-girls, who, under the direction of the two elders, were rubbing her limbs and patting her hands to bring her to herself."

" Ahi! she is alive!" exclaimed one of the girls, on feeling the hand of Leilah press hers convulsively.

" Alive! — why not? — what should ail her?" uttered the Toorkoman lady, in a harsh voice — " there has been no harm done to her, and upon my head be it; it is not a day's march in the sah-

rah or the hills that will kill such as her — young bones bear stout burthens. Bismillah! girl — open your eyes."

The eye of Leilah did in truth open with a wild look, and gazed distractedly around her. — "Ahi, my soul, what news?" again uttered the cracked voice of the Toorkomanee, "how is your brain?" and she grasped and shook the poor girl's shoulder. A faint scream from Leilah was all her reply, and as the eye again closed, she drew her hands from the slave-girls who held them, and pressed them convulsively on the lids.

"La illah-il-ullah!" muttered the Toorkomanee, "we are showing off our airs, mashallah! — this is the khan's beauty; in the name of God! — my *tuh* upon such beauties, with no more substance than a dried lambskin, and no more strength than a wasted camel! — God is great! — there's my daughter, Neissa, would make four of such split-reeds."

"Aye, khanum, if she were like your Neissa, there might be some better apology for turning the country upside down for her sake — hard work and much trouble has thy worthy son, the excellent Goorg Allee Beg had for this twelvemonth on her account — but God is great! these khans will have their fancies — and after all Zekee Khan is indeed a man, mashallah!"

"Aye, mashallah! no doubt" responded the Toorkoman dame, in a voice that said very nearly the direct contrary — "but sometimes he is a fool — by your head, oh nana, he is a fool when it pleases God — See now, were it not for that son of mine what would he be? — here sits the khan in his khelwut, drinking strong drink, or chewing opium — or in his harem, toying with some new rosebud of beauty, mashallah — some girl of these Kuzzilbash dogs, my contempt upon them! — We Toorko-

mans, who have been his friends, and whose young men have been the wall to begird Kallah Khan, which his enemies cannot break — we have nothing good enough for him — our daughters, fair as the Feringhees, and whose limbs are straight and agile as the fawns of the desert — they are less than the least — they are as the dust under his feet — when did he ever say 'bismillah!' to a girl of the Goklan? La-illah-il-ullah!"

"True have you said, by your soul, oh khanum — doubtless thy son is a man — a man indeed — a pillar of the state — the sword of war — well — the khan knows his merits — after all, is he not the first in the fort and the state, after the khan himself — whose dog is he, that shall dare to defile the hem of his garment?"

"Aye mashallah! we are something after all," responded the old Toorkomanee, raising her inharmonious voice, and swelling with hideous pride, until her small eyes shot a baleful lustre, like that of a snake about to sting, while the nostrils of her flat misshapen nose distended like those of a braying jackass.— "We are something in Semulghan, and it is fit that these daughters of burnt fathers should know it.—As for the khan, mashallah! he is pleased with small things, and if this toy adds to his folly or his intoxication, it shall never be Tenkah banou that will interfere.— Destiny is everything, after all — what is written must be; and if the khan thinks fit to throw away his fortune for a tulip-cheek or a broken pitcher, it is his own affair, not ours."

In the mean time the subject of these observations awoke gradually to the misery of her true situation. Anguish came with recollection, and her sobs interrupted the dialogue.

"Ahi! thou foolish creature! what is the news

now?" screamed the Toorkomanee—"what ails thee, daughter of a dog?—is it not enough that thy betters defile themselves with serving thee, but thou must blacken their faces with thy silly grief?"

"Nay, khanum, by your soul, do not frighten the silly thing—after all she is ignorant."

"Ignorant!—then may God enlighten her!—high time it is she should know her duty. But may God protect you, nana, and give you joy of your precious charge—I have other concerns to mind." With these words, spoken in the bitterest tone of sarcasm, the mother of Goorg Allee quitted the apartment, leaving Leilah lost in perplexity and terror in the hands of the other women.

The old gees-suffeed, after administering a few words intended to console her charge, informed her that a bath had been prepared to refresh her, after her forced and fatiguing march, and that the sooner she took advantage of it the better. "Here, girls," said she, "assist the lady to rise, and do you, my soul, take heart—God is great!—who can tell what your fate may be—what, child?—who knows but you may turn the khan's heart upside down, and have all your own way in the harem? Never mind the banou—her words are air—but you will know more of her by-and-by; and make friends with her, I advise you, for she is not a small person in the kallah."

There is a cord in every human breast, which, if fitly touched, will vibrate to the voice of sympathy and benevolence. Slight and uncouth as were the old woman's expressions of kindness, they made their way to Leilah's heart; the convulsive sobs which shook her frame found relief in a passion of tears, and she threw herself at the old woman's knees—"Oh, mother! mother!" cried she—"have mercy upon me! I am a miserable crea-

ture! Oh, my own dear nana! where are you? what has become of you? And you, my kind Noor Bukhsh?—Oh, are they all murdered?—Shall I never see them more?—and my father—my dear kind father!—Oh Allah, Allah! what will become of me?"

Touched by her deplorable state, the old woman, whose heart was in truth by no means devoid of kindness, exerted herself to encourage and assuage the grief of Leilah. She accompanied her to the bath, where all the art of that rude quarter of the country was exhausted, to remove the effects of fatigue and agitation. Her limbs were rubbed and kneaded all over, and an infusion of salutiferous herbs was made use of, to allay the burning heat, which already had begun to parch her skin. The cooling hinna, a rare luxury in these parts, was applied to the soles of her hands and feet, and a sherbet of peculiar efficacy was given to quench her distressing thirst.

The truth was, that Leilah, unaccustomed to such an excess of agitation and misery, in spite of all their care, was already in a high fever; racking pains pervaded her bones; her burning eyes seemed bursting from their sockets; and, before the night closed in, a delirium, which frightened her attendants half out of their senses, steeped those of the patient in ignorance, at least, of all that was passing around her. It was during this delirium that her constant appeals to her old nurse, and her calls for Noor Bukhsh, her favourite slave-girl, had attracted the notice of those around her; and the khan, who was furious at the thoughts of losing anything which had cost him so much pains to obtain, caused search to be made for those whose presence might conduce to her recovery. It was then, too, that the proclamation which had been

reported to the meerza was made: the old nurse had been seen or heard of by no one in the fort; but it was sufficiently well known that several young females had been made captives along with the khanum, Leilah; and it seemed probable that the slave-girl in question might be of the number.

For three days, Leilah continued dangerously ill; but the utter ignorance of her attendants proved, perhaps, her best protection, for they left her mostly to nature and herself, merely insisting, occasionally, on forcing down her throat the nostrum of some Toorkoman leech, or on binding the charm of some wandering fakeer about her arm or neck; but she was permitted to drink her medicinal sherbet at will, and in time the fever abated: her *tukdeer* was not that a flower so fair should wither so soon — nature did her part, and the bended lily once more raised its languid head.

Still she was greatly enfeebled — she sat on her couch weak and exhausted, her despondency manifesting itself ever and anon in floods of tears and heavy groans; and her attendants began to fear that in spite of the fever having left her, she would pine away from sheer grief. "Look up, unhappy! — I bring you comfort," said the old gees-suffeed one day, as she entered, introducing another aged female — "behold one of your people — is this the nana you have been crying for so bitterly?" Poor Leilah sprang from her couch to welcome, as she hoped, her dear old nurse. She was disappointed: it was not Atougha, but it was one who, having been employed in menial offices about the harem, she well knew, and who knew her also: and to the heart of the forlorn Leilah, which would have warmed even to a dog of her father's house, the joy of seeing one living human thing whom she had known there overbalanced the pang of her disap-

pointment—she threw herself on the old woman's neck, and burst into a flood of less bitter tears than those she had hitherto shed; for she felt as if she now were not so utterly destitute—as if this old creature was still a link between her and those she loved.

"Ah, my mistress! my khanum!" sobbed the poor woman, whose own calamity seemed freshly revived in her mind, on witnessing the distress of her lady—"what a day have we seen!—what a day of sorrow and evil fortune!—*Jehannum* itself broke loose! And these devils!—ah! may their fathers burn!—how they came down upon us—how they did kill and destroy!"

"Alas! alas! too true!" groaned Leilah: "it was a day of judgment—oh! the attack of the kafilah on the way from Mushed was nothing to it. *He* was there then, and there was hope; now—now he is absent, and all is dark—hopeless. But who are killed, Fatmeh?—by your soul! tell me that!"

"Ai wahi! mistress! what can I tell? There are many—a vast many; but how should I know? I was blind with fear. They threw me down, and one of them had his sword out to kill me, and my heart became like water: but then came another, who said 'Hold!'—that is, one of the khanum's people—'she may be wanted.' So they dragged me off, and lifted me upon a horse—mashallah! I never was on such a one before!—and away they went."

"And know you nothing of my dear nana? or of Noor Buksh?—are they among the dead?"

"Ah! lady, I know not—I saw nothing of them. But have you seen your brother?"

"Who?—merciful Allah!—Abbas Koolee!—What of him, for God's sake!"

"Alas! he, too, is a prisoner! [illegible] him tied

hand and foot, upon a horse—I knew his beautiful eyes and his fine locks, the dear youth!—very kind has he often been to old Fatmeh."

"Almighty God!" exclaimed Leilah, her thoughts for the moment quite diverted from her own misery—"what will become of my dear father?—oh, my dear brother, in what unblest dungeon are you now pining?" From that moment, she resolved to have an interview with her brother, if he were in the kalleh; and when her guardian again appeared, she besought her, with terms that might have moved a savage, to procure her a sight of this beloved relative. The old gees-suffeed, though unpolished and gross, was no savage. There could not, so far as she saw, be any harm in letting the poor thing see her brother; and accordingly, when next she saw the khan, she represented the good policy of indulging the drooping girl in a favour that could hurt no one, and might have a very salutary effect upon her mental and bodily health.

The joy and astonishment of the khan, when he heard the request, sufficiently betrayed how little he knew of the full value of the prize he had won. "The son as well as the daughter! Barikillah! Oh, my good luck—Allah! Allah! both in my power? Ahi! Sirafrauz Khan, thou that didst withdraw thy hand from my skirt, see now whether thou canst get thy head from under my girdle—son and daughter! the whole hope of the house! Pity the old banou had not been taken too—we should have had Sirafrauz himself coming to beg for a lodging. La illah-il-ullah! God is great!" So telling the old gees-suffeed that the lady should by all means see her brother, he ordered one of his officers to take the old Beyaut woman along with him, and search among the prisoners for the youth, who, unt[illegible] was not suspected to be of their

number. In fact, Abbas Koolee, when taken, with a presence of mind extraordinary in one so young, had purposely concealed his name and quality, aware that a knowledge of the fact would very greatly prejudice the condition of his father's affairs. The good effects of this prudence had been frustrated by the unfortunate communication of old Fatmeh, and the triumph of the khan of Semulghan was complete.

The interview between Leilah and her brother was sweet, but deeply affecting to both. Prisoners in the hands of a heartless and unprincipled tyrant, what could either look forward to but the severest and most degrading treatment? Yet, even their own misfortune was lost sight of in the misery and bereavement of their father — the inevitable ruin of his house. What must be his feelings on returning to his plundered, desolated home? With his family thus in the hands of his enemy, what terms could he make with such a foe? And bitterly now did Leilah lament the consequences of her unconscious error, in letting her captors know the treasure they had ignorantly possessed, in the only son of Sirafrauz Khan.

From her brother she learned, that on the morning when the yeilàk was attacked, in consequence of the representations of Mustapha Beg, he had detached a portion of the servants and armed men who were appointed for the protection of the khan's dwelling, to assist in repelling the expected attack upon the upper chummun, and that the rush of the ambushed enemy, which was simultaneous with the alarm below, had been so sudden and overwhelming, as at once to bear down all the force he had to oppose it. It was more than ever obvious how artfully their policy had been directed to disperse and place out of reach of the true point of

attack, all the disposable force of the place; nor was it less remarkable how perfectly they seemed to know where to lay hands upon the principal object of their enterprise. For himself, overthrown and seized in a moment, the boy blessed the dark joobbah, and felt cap which seemed to have misled his assailants regarding his own quality. He was hurried away in the confusion, with other prisoners; and, on reaching Kallah Khan, had been thrust along with them into a strongly guarded prison, where he had lain in a miserable condition enough, until old Fatmeh, entering with one of the khan's officers, recognized him. From this time, the youth was separately and more carefully guarded; and although by no means treated as became a prisoner of his rank, (for of such generosity the khan was incapable,) he was less subjected to positive privation and indignity.

But a trial of a different, and not less dreadful nature, still awaited Leilah. So overwhelmed had she been by sorrow and by sickness, that at first she scarcely knew or cared into whose hands she had fallen, and had but a faint and obscure idea of the fate which she had to contemplate. She knew, indeed, that she was a captive — torn from her home and family, and in the power of her captors; yet her imagination had never dwelt upon the extent to which that power might be exerted. She was aware that her life was in their hands — that she might be made a slave, and forced to work and toil as she had seen slaves do in her father's household. Further degradation had never occurred to her mind — she felt — bitterly felt that she was separated from her lover; and the thought would sometimes flash across her brain like a stunning blow, that he might be dead — that their separation was to be forever! These were her worst appre-

hensions; and gloomy though they were, a voice of hope would sometimes arise in her soul, and whisper that he was still alive, and would never abandon her. Of the former negociations regarding herself, between her father and present master, Leilah was utterly ignorant — she knew, indeed, that a feud existed between them, but never thought of or inquired into its origin. She had been early informed that the khan had insisted upon a personal interview with her, as soon as her health should be re-established, but attributed no motive to this demand, beyond that of curiosity, nor anticipated any other unpleasant consequence to herself, than that of degradation — of being made painfully sensible of the condition in which she was henceforth to regard herself — that of slave to an unfeeling despot. She was doomed to be fearfully undeceived.

The appointed time arrived, and Leilah, pale and sinking, having once more been led like a victim to the bath, and tricked out in the finery provided by her tyrant, was taken into the apartment of the harem, where he was wont, after the manner of a despotic eastern prince, to receive his women. Trembling and dizzy, every object swam before her as she entered; her eye caught no form; but her ears were wounded by the insolently familiar and blustering tones of one, who was not only coarse and brutal in reality, but who took a delight, as it seemed, in displaying it.

"Hoh-ho!" said he, in accents which lost nothing of their native rudeness from the influence of inebriation under which they were uttered — "so, this is the lady — *kooshomedeed!* you are welcome, fair one — welcome, by my soul! Ahi! your place has long been empty — thanks be to God! it is filled at length. So — this, then, is the daughter

of our friend Sirafrauz Beyaut! this is the celebrated Leilah — mashallah! praised be God! our luck is great at last — take off thy veil, maiden — no one wears a veil here — this is my *khelwut*. But what aileth thee? still *nasauz* (unwell)?" continued he, seeing that the unhappy girl was ready to sink to the ground — "Hah! by the head of the khan, that must not be — we'll have no sick folk — it is our desire, and we order thee forthwith to be well — Allah-il-ullah! why, nana! where is that gees-suffeed with a burnt father? what dirt is this thou hast been eating, old woman? Did we not command thee to restore this, our captive maiden, to health, that she might be in a state to be illuminated by the light of our favour, when we should summon her to our presence? and behold, she faileth even at our very feet — hah!"

"By your head, khan, you are too harsh," replied the old woman, who saw the state of things — what can your servants help it, if the maiden's heart is with her father and her home? She is young — she will cure of that in time; and, as for our care, your servants have no fault — if the father of physicians had been there, he could have done no more: then, think of it, khan — a virgin, and in your presence? La illah-il-ullah! will you allow nothing for coyness? Is it wonderful if she trembles? is it wonderful if her heart be turned upside down? By your soul, khan, let the poor things it — say, bismillah! be seated."

"Hoh! *cheh aib dared? benisheen!* what harm in that? Be seated, girl, be seated. Bismillah!" And as the trembling Leilah, who, in truth, could have stood no longer, sunk down upon the numud near the door, he called out in a stentorian voice — "Hither! come higher, maiden — near us — mashallah! we are no blood drinker, that thou shouldst

fear our breath — approach!" And the women assisting her, she rose and seated herself still nearer the khan.

"But why, in the name of God, does she keep her veil on, nana? — off with it, girl — no woman goes veiled here. Hah! what says she? ——" A slight exclamation of disgust and terror had, in truth, broke from the terrified girl at this command, and she clasped the veil with a firmer grasp. "Unveil, my soul — off with that chudder — do not displease the khan," said the old woman in a coaxing voice, as she approached her.

"What news is this, nana? — by the head of my father! what fool have we here?" roared the khan; "does she think to laugh at our beard in our own underoon? — off with her veil, I say;" and, at the word, the old Toorkoman matron who was present, adroitly slipping behind Leilah, replied, "May I be your sacrifice, khan, no one thinks of refusing — behold the virgin unveiled:" and, with one twitch, she pulled off the covering and exposed the face and head of Leilah. "Barikillah, banou!" exclaimed the khan, with a horse laugh: "well hast thou done — that is the way to deal with these coy ones. But what have we here? — is this truly Leilah? — is this the much-praised beauty? Allah il-ullah! we thought to have seen a tulip-cheeked, moon-faced damsel — and behold a pale, sickly wench, yellow as a withered melon, and lean as a starved camel! — may the tombs of the fathers of all Kuzzilbash girls be polluted!" and, in truth, Leilah, pale and worn out by suffering, covered with indignant, yet terrified confusion, was as unlike the blooming rose of the Kallah Feerozeh and the Kudum Moobarik, as the soiled and withered garlands of a feast that is

past, resemble the fresh-born flowers that scent the gardens of the great.

A shriek escaped her at the outrage; and, that she did not give way to the combined effect of weakness and apprehension, and sink prostrate upon the carpet where she sat, was rather owing to the excitement of indignation than the exertion of any positive courage on the maiden's part.

"By your soul, khan," said the Toorkomanee, scornfully, "what had you to expect? If you wanted a steed of bone and blood, would you look for him in the valleys of Irak, or the plains of Attock? Did you expect that the blood of Beyaut would supply the active forms and the portly charms of the Goklan? Mashallah! if thou didst, behold thy folly! Doubtless, those who told thee of this weak one, have eaten dirt by the maun! — a fit thing, by the soul of my father! to turn a whole country upside down, and your harem into jehannum for, as you have done, mashallah! — and even now the dog's daughter will laugh at your beard and throw dust on our heads. Remember the words of Tenkah! — bismillah! — I take my leave!"

"Laugh at *my* beard, banou? — throw dirt on *my* head, saidst thou?" roared the khan. "By the head of the prophet! we shall see by what account she reckons, and whether she will find her profit in that. Am I the khan, or am I not, hah?"

The thunder of his voice fixed the regards of his victim; her eye wandered timidly and almost unconsciously, to the person from whence these revolting sounds proceeded, but they were quickly withdrawn in disgust; and it was not till after many furtive glances that she comprehended how hideous the monster was, whose prey she had become. Zekee Khan, although still a young man,

had nothing in his aspect of "the golden light of youth;" nor, indeed, much of its appearance, in any shape, except the rude and boisterous recklessness which characterizes debauchery in young persons. Already had face and figure become bloated with intemperance; a huge nose, which, by its colour and shape betrayed the free use of forbidden liquors, arose between two large protuberant eyes, the whites of which, bloodshot and inflamed, confirmed the tale. The red and purple of his cheeks might, but for these, have passed for the evidence of plethoric health; yet there was a vulgar, arrogant stolidity in the half-open mouth and dropping jaw that could belong to none but a besotted mind.

The dress of this personage, disordered and unseemly, no less than the flushed countenance, indicated habitual as well as present inebriety. In truth, the khan had, from an early age, become addicted both to the use of opium and of intoxicating liquors; and, so much had this increased with years, as to have materially injured an excellent constitution, degraded a naturally grovelling mind, and exacerbated a temper and dispositions originally bad and depraved. He was totally incapable of governing, and, had it not been for his unprincipled, but able coadjutor, Goorg Allee, he would, long before the time we speak of, have fallen before the fortune of some one of his enterprising and less infatuated neighbours. Such was the person that now, in the shape of her lord and master, presented himself to the eyes of the horror-struck Leilah — to her who, until this misfortune, had been the child of indulgence and the object of attention in a well-regulated domestic establishment — no wonder, then, that she shuddered at his hateful familiarity, and only thought of how she

might withdraw from it. Had an idea of the frightful lengths to which it was his purpose to exert his rights over her person once entered her mind, her despair would have been complete, and she would have courted death as her only release.

There is a purity and native delicacy in the female breast, the growth of every age and country, which, when unsullied in early life by education or circumstances, shrinks naturally from all contact with grossness or sensuality. Leilah, though born in a land where such virtues in either sex are rare, had, fortunately, been so placed as to avoid the evil of contagion. Her father, a man of naturally elevated mind, absorbed in schemes of conquest and ambition, was little addicted to those sensual indulgences which degrade the character of both sexes in the east. The mother of Leilah and Abbas Koolee was dead, and his affection was chiefly absorbed by her children. The lady who now was his only wife, and who had been placed at the head of his harem rather from considerations of policy than love, shared little of his love though much of his esteem; and she, frigid by constitution, and prudish in all that regarded the sanctity of the underoon and female honour, was not a person to taint or sully the mind of his daughter. On the other hand, the old nana, to whose peculiar care she had been entrusted, although she had no objection to entertain her charge with tales of romantic love, was innocent in heart herself, and preserved the innocency of her charge. Thus Leilah had happily been preserved almost entirely from that female gossip and laxity of habit and conversation which, in eastern harems, so often and so utterly degrades the female mind, and unfits it for high and virtuous aspirations.

Never until her meeting with Reza Koolee had Leilah been conscious of actual love — of a positive preference for any individual of the other sex. Her affection had been lavished on her father, her brother, her nurse, her birds, or her flowers; for in common with all her kind, she did assuredly feel that necessity of loving — that void which nature has left in every heart, to be filled, in due time, with the image of its adoration — but never till then had it strayed to man. Even since that event, her passion—for passion deep and lasting it had become, evinced its power rather in a delicious abandonment of thought to one engrossing theme — a concentrated devotion of mind and heart and soul to the beloved object, than in any warmer emotion. She could have lived for ever, as she thought, conversing with and gazing on her lover — lying on his bosom, or supporting his head upon her lap, and never dreamt of greater bliss. But to be separated from him was death — it was the loss of life to her soul — of light to her eyes.

With a mind so constituted by nature and by habit, and so pre-occupied, the impression made upon her by the disgusting scene and objects we have only partially ventured to describe, may be imagined; but it is not easy to paint her horror and astonishment, when the truth dawned upon her, as the khan in gross and unequivocal terms, conversed with the other women, as to his views regarding her, as if she were a party in nowise interested. She gave one piercing shriek, and starting up, would have fled from the apartment; but her limbs failed her before she could reach the door, and she fell in strong convulsions into the arms of the attendants.

Even the old woman, so long a witness of her master's brutality, was shocked at [illegible] intent upon

this occasion. "Punah-be-khodah! khan, have you become mad?" said she — "Do you speak to the daughter of a Kuzzilbash khan, as you would to one of these cows of Toorkomanees, or the girl of a Mushedee shop-keeper? — truly you deserve that she should slip through your fingers, after all, and laugh at your beard, as the banou threatened."

The khan, who, under the influence of intoxication, and of his rancour against the chief of the Beyaut, had given a loose to the brutal malice of his nature, was too much confounded at the effect of his violence, to evince any displeasure at the remonstrance of the gees-suffeed. He forced an aukward laugh, and growled out a few words, in which curses and abuse were mingled with gross jests, while the old woman left the apartment, muttering, on her side,—"La-illah-ullah! see what comes of drunkenness and opium eating! Grumbler, tyrant, and madman by turns. Astaffcrullah! the harem gets less like paradise and more like jehannum every day — Allah only knows what will be the end of it."

The unhappy Leilah, in the mean time was once more borne to her chamber, where, after a night of raving, she awoke to a bitter sense of her misery. Even the rude and heartless women who attended her were moved, and endeavoured most ineffectually to console her — the efforts of an angel would have failed at such a season — she could only think upon the lover from whom she was so fatally severed, and the horrid fate she was reserved for: but the thought was too dreadful to dwell on. "Oh, no!" she would shudder and exclaim, "death! — rather death! — any thing but that!" and then, turning to the old nana, she would beseech her by her soul — for the sake of the blessed prophet — of Allah himself — to save her, to protect her! The

natural, though unfashioned kindness of the old woman, prompted her to soothe the fears of her charge; and she had, besides, received the orders of her master, in his sober mood, to omit no means of reconciling Leilah to her situation — for he feared that so fragile a frame might be destroyed by grief or harsh treatment, and this would have equally disappointed his views in regard to herself and to her father; — so she plied her with assurances that no ill was meant her; that, however violent the khan might be in his cups, he was a good creature in the main when sober — and an abundance of all the empty expressions of service and love and regard, which Persians so readily command, until the poor girl's mind became more calm; and she actually began to think that her alarm had been premature; that she had misunderstood the disgusting proposals of the khan; and that no worse evil was intended her than slavery and confinement.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was on the third day after Leilah's interview with the khan, that a Toorkoman, mounted upon a powerful horse, and carrying behind him a veiled female, entered the town, and, ascending to the gate of the Kallah, demanded admittance to the khan. On enquiring his business, he said that, having heard of the proclamation made for the slave-girl, Noor Bukhsh, who had been taken in the chappow of the Yeilâk Sirâbeh, he had sought out and brought her to the fort, and now claimed the promised reward. He was instantly admitted, and led before the khan, who, seated in his dewan khaneh, was surrounded by Koordish and Toorkoman chiefs, and who immediately questioned him regarding his business.

"Who mayst thou be, friend? and whence dost thou come?" was the demand uttered by the chief, after he had cast a scrutinizing look over the athletic person of the stranger, whose one eye was extinguished, as it seemed, by the effects of a wound which had scarred his cheek.

"I am Osman Keur, Yemoot," was the reply, uttered in a tone as harsh as the man's appearance. "I have come, according to the khan's wish, to bring him the maiden, Noor Bukhsh — and I look to receive the reward."

"And how camest thou to be in possession of the maiden, friend? — wert thou the thief that stole her from us after my people had taken her at the yeilâk?"

"No thief am I, khan, nor was I at the yeilâk with thy people. Tidings of the chappow reached me, nevertheless, and I came to hear how a part of the plunder was disposed of. I heard of thy proclamation — I recovered the girl, and am here to receive the reward with one hand, and deliver her to thee with the other — that is all I have to say."

"A strange story this, friend — a Yemoot consorting with the Goklan! From whence art thou, man? and how camest thou among them?"

"My *teer* is that of Yawultâsh, which pasture their flocks on the shores of Mangushluck; but it is many years since I saw their tents. Since then, I have lived with the Saleras of Serrukhs — I have chappowed with the Tekehs of Merve, and served with the Karawees of Toorbut."

"Thy face has no trace of the Yemoot," growled an old Goklan âk-sakâl: "I know the Yemoot well: dost thou think to laugh at our beards? — beware!"

"Dost *thou* relish dirt with thy white beard, that thou eatest it so fast?" replied the Yemoot, with indignant contempt: "better open thine eyes and shut thy mouth, if it can utter nothing better. What profit would a lie be of to me? If he hath the maiden, and I have my reward, who suffers? — It is enough ——"

"By the bones of my father! he says right in that," observed the Khan. "Let the maiden be taken to the underoon — let the daughter of Sirafrauz Khan be made glad, and it shall be enough; thy reward, man, will be secure."

The eye of the Toorkoman followed the maiden, as she followed the attendant towards the underoon and a shade of anxiety might have been detected passing over his features; but he only said, "Mashallah! it is a good maiden!" and seating himself on his heels in a corner of the court, he awaited the result.

The maiden was taken at once to the chamber where Leilah, attended by old Fatmeh alone, was sitting disconsolately. She raised her head listlessly at the bustle which was caused by the stranger's entrance, and her eyes fell upon her still-veiled figure; but her heart beat with an indescribable emotion, as the old woman said, "Lady, be of good cheer; we bring you comfort; here is one you have long wished to see — behold your slave, Noor Bukhsh."

"Noor Bukhsh!" exclaimed Leilah, falteringly; but her further speech was arrested by an expressive gesture of the stranger's, who, throwing off her veil, ran forward, in the fashion of a slave, to her mistress, and clapsed her knees. Leilah looked earnestly upon the face before her, paused for one moment, and threw herself upon the stranger's bosom with a shriek of joy; but it was not the features of Noor Bukhsh that caused her emotion — it was those of Guleyaz, who, as she returned her embrace, whispered "Beware! — I am Noor Bukhsh — remember!" The obvious delight of Leilah at the meeting was sufficient for the unsuspecting gees-suffeed; she instantly returned to the khan with the good news, while her charge, with a

short explanation to Fatmeh, whom she dismissed with an injunction to silence, as she valued her life, once more threw herself into the arms of Reza Koolee's sister, and abandoned herself to a delight that had long been foreign to her soul.

The khan, in the meantime, was so satisfied at hearing of Leilah's joy, that, turning to the Toorkoman, who still sat in his corner, he said, "Osman Keur, G lan or Yemoot, mashallah! your face is wh'te tl day: meerza, let him have the reward, and a good *chogha* (cloak) into the bargain—he deserves it, were he the father of Yemoot himself." And the Toorkoman, making his rude obeisance, with "May your house be prosperous, inchallah!" withdrew, pursued by many an invidious look from the party, some of whom seemed sorely to doubt his honesty: but the khan was content with his bargain, and there the matter ended.

The first words of Guleyaz, on being left alone with Leilah, were calculated to impress upon her that the life and safety, and chance of ultimate deliverance of both depended upon her being taken for the slave-girl, Noor Bukhsh, in whose character alone could she have procured admission to the harem of Zekee Khan. "It was known," said she, "to my brother, that proclamation had been made for the girl, on purpose that she might attend on her former mistress; and as he learned from your father that she had not been taken at all, he instantly formed the project of introducing, for your comfort, a friend in her stead. Hazardous in many ways as the experiment was, I did not hesitate a moment: our preparations were soon complete; and, permitting so much time only to elapse as might give colour to our story, my brother, in the disguise of a Toorkoman, carried me hither. Thanks

be to God! our scheme has so far succeeded—may he grant it a happy issue, inchallah!"

"But my father, my dear friend!—my father!"

"He is well," said Guleyaz, "but miserably anxious on your account—he will be so, until he hears of our success."

"And—and your brother—my deliverer?"

"He, too, is well, and in this place."

"Oh, God!—in this place?—in the midst of so many enemies?"

"Fear not for him, Leilah: he is here, but he is safe—safe in a secure disguise, and safe in the support of steady friends: there are some even here to aid us—but, my dear sister, there are others more in danger than him."

"Ah! true—yourself, dearest Guleyaz. Oh! what can repay such devotion—such—"

"Nothing but yielding yourself implicitly to the guidance of those who have risked all to deliver you. But it was yourself I meant, not them—they are overpaid, if they succeed; if not ——— Think you, were it in your power, that you are able to fly with us?"

"Able to fly from hence!" exclaimed Leilah, springing from her couch—"oh, God! the very thought inspires me with life! Oh! were I but once free from this place, I feel as if my strength could never fail! Oh! take me hence, even if I die in leaving it!—kill me, rather than let me stay here!"

"It is well, inchallah! you shall neither remain nor die. Listen to me: in six days hence is the *Shub-e-jumah*, and, the new moon falling upon that day, the Toorkomans hold it as a great feast: both camp and village will be in a bustle with rejoicing—every one will be occupied—and, consequently, those who are confined or watched will have more

liberty than usual. There have been great discontents of late. The khan is blamed by his Toorkoman allies, as having frequently deceived them; and doubtless, had it not been for the efforts of his friend, Goorg Allee, who is an able villain, they would long ago have exchanged the voice of friendship for the tone of hostility. Goorg Allee is fortunately detained from hence, and my brother has been in treaty with certain of their âk-sakâls, two of whom have been gained by large presents to assist him. It is by their aid, and on the night I have mentioned, that we are to attempt releasing you,—may God grant us success, inchallah!"

"Inchallah! inchallah! but oh, my soul, do you know one thing—have you understood that the boy Abbas Koolee, my brother, is also confined in this place?"

"Be content—that is also known, and provision will be made for his release at the same time."

"Allah! Allah! may thy shadow be upon us! Grant us a fortunate issue, inchallah! but say how is this great thing to be effected—how are we to get from hence, or how can your brother ever reach us here?"

"Fear not for that—when the arrangements are complete, you shall be told how to proceed; but, in the mean time, inform me of what has occurred since you entered these walls." The recital was not long: Guleyaz herself shuddered at Leilah's description of the tyrant, in whose power they *both* now were, but again she encouraged her to be sanguine in the hope of deliverance. "You must try, my soul, to regain health and strength—feign less reluctance at the thought of another visit to the khan—by so doing, you may contrive to delay it for some days: express a desire to take the fresh

air upon the hill; it will benefit your health, and be the first step to liberty — I shall be permitted to attend you. In a day or two, you must solicit another visit from your brother; he can then be put upon his guard, and prepare for what is to come. If the khan be impatient, express no terror — feign some excuse — say that, until after the Shub-e-jumah, you do not use the bath — after which you will be ready in his service — inchallah! by that time the danger will be past."

"Oh, God grant it!" said Leilah — "but I tremble even now, in every limb, at the thought of what must happen. Oh! what an age till Jumah!"

"Leilah, you must be firm — for all will depend upon yourself. Think of your father, of your brother — think of him who risks his own life, and that of his only sister, for your sake, and never dream of fear — you, a girl of the tribes, talk of trembling? would you make yourself unworthy of being the wife of a chief — the mother of warriors?"

"Oh! forgive me, friend — no, never. Oh! not for myself is this fear — for them, for *him* I could die! Oh! I was prepared to die — never, never should that horrid fate have been mine — pure and untarnished should I have gone down to the grave, for the honour of my father's house — faithful and devoted to thee, Reza Koolee! But, to know that so much depends upon a chance — so much upon my frail self — and to think of it all, to dream of it for so long — it is this that makes me fear. I shall believe that every one who looks at me, suspects me. Oh! it is not death that I fear, it is the discovery and ruin that may come upon all."

The more firm Guleyaz, touched by the earnest affection of her weaker friend, bent over her and

folded her in her embrace. "Leilah," said she impressively, "I once more conjure you to dismiss these thoughts — to take courage — put trust in Allah, and he will support you — firmness is now an imperative duty — make but the effort, and *he will* assist you. Think you that *I* have no cause for anxiety? Is not my brother's life every moment now in jeopardy? As for my own, what were it worth were they once to imagine that a sister of Reza Koolee is within these gates. My honour, thanks to Allah, is in my own keeping; neither cruel tyrant nor brutal khan can endanger it — behold its safeguards!" And, with one hand she drew from beneath her arm, where it lay concealed in her vest, a small but keen dagger of the finest steel; while with the other, opening the handkerchief that covered her neck, she pointed to a little box, like those used for holding talismans, that hung there. "The use of this is plain," continued she, holding up the dagger — "but this, this is the true friend, which cannot fail me — were my hands bound behind me, I could reach it thus; and, once tasted, it will stretch me, in five minutes, a corse at their feet." And the proud firmness of the maiden's countenance, testified that her resolution was fully equal to the employment of this desperate means of safety.

Leilah shuddered and grew pale: but one thought of the interview she had already endured, and the horrid consequences that might attend a repetition, restored her self-possession. "Guleyaz!" said she, "thou wilt share that friendly aid with me — our plans may fail, and then! — Oh! leave me not without such means of safety!"

"Certainly — but, inchallah! we shall neither of us require it. Be firm and confident, as becomes

the daughter of a chief, and our plans shall not fail."

They were interrupted. The mother of Goorg Allee, Tenkah, the Toorkomanee who has been more than once introduced to the reader's notice, and who, it was observed, exercised no small influence in the khan's harem, entered the apartment with but little ceremony of intimation; and, casting her keen oblique-set eyes around, with an inquisitive look, she sat herself down with a slight "Salaam aleicoom!" uttered in her usual harsh voice. Leilah, who had risen from her numud on the other's entrance, returned the salutation with a faltering voice; while Guleyaz, in her character as a slave, retired, and remained standing at the bottom of the apartment.

"We trust that your health is reinstated — that your condition is improved," said the Toorkomanee — "Mashallah! you look well — your appearance is altered for the better — you will soon be sufficiently recovered to be presented again at the threshold of the khan's favour, inchallah!" — "Alhumdul-illah" and "inchallah!" responded Leilah, in faltering accents, while her heart uttered a fervent "May God avert it!" But, she felt that her part was begun, and stole a glance at Guleyaz, who replied with an encouraging look.

"It is well!" said the Toorkomanee: "we trust, that when that honour shall next await you, it will meet with a more fitting reception on your part than formerly. By the head of the prophet, our khan is a soldier, and has neither time nor patience for women's fancies — sick damsels and squalling wenches don't do in Kallah Khan. When a girl enters the harem here, let her behave well, and she is a queen — if not, it is soon at an end with her,

and nobody asks how — mashallah! there is an old well in the ruins without, there — it could tell strange tales — but, praised be Allah! you are wise, no doubt — what need we say more."

The eyes of Guleyaz shot fire, in spite of self-control and prudence; and Leilah could only mutter some indistinct words of acquiescence. "The servant of the khan is always ready — may his favour increase — we are at his disposal!" &c., in answer to the malicious chatter of the Toorkomanee, who, however, seemed altogether independent of reply; for, casting a glance at Guleyaz, she continued — "And who have we here — an addition to your ladyship's establishment? mashallah! since your servant was here last in your service — barikillah! a goodly wench — one of your countrywomen, doubtless — hither, girl, hither — we would look at you." Guleyaz, controlling by a powerful effort both her indignation and alarm, stood before the Toorkomanee with downcast eyes, and a countenance of steady meekness; and endured a long scrutinizing examination, without evincing the smallest impatience, or aught beyond the natural confusion, which a slave-girl might be supposed to experience on this occasion.

"Hah! — a Beyaut you say?"

"Thy slave is of that tribe."

"Where were you born?"

"In a village near Nishapour, now a ruin — it was chappowed by the Toorkomans."

"Girl, these eyes have more of the Koordish fire than the Beyaut sleepiness — art sure thou hast not Koordish blood in thy veins?"

"At the khanum's pleasure — her slave is less than the least — she has said the truth."

"By the khan's head! that is a Koordish tongue too. Truly, girl, one would rather have believed

thee to have been a lady in Boojnoord or Mianabad, than a slave at Kallah Feerozeh."

"Thy slave has no answer to make — what can she say?"

"What is thy name?"

"The name of thy slave is Noor Bukhsh."

"Ameen! — so be it: but, as I am a true Mussulmaunee, thou hast Koordish blood. What? we Toorkomans have good cause to know both Koords and Beyauts. Mashallah! we have burned the fathers of both, and shall do so, please God, again — for the rest, by the khan's salt! the slave is well worth the mistress — the khan might make a brave exchange." So saying, she changed the conversation, but continued her sarcastic and stinging remarks, infusing venom, like the snake, into every thing she touched with her tongue; until at length she departed, leaving the two maidens at a loss to imagine whether she had actually imbibed some suspicion regarding their plans, or had only come, according to her custom, to vent her bile and torment Leilah. At all events, with so keen-sighted and dangerous an enemy, the greatest circumspection was necessary, and the visit, however disagreeable, had, at least, the good effect of stimulating their minds to caution.

The desire of Leilah for liberty to breathe the fresh air was readily acceded to; for the favourable alteration in her health, cheerfulness and general deportment, attributable, in great degree, as they supposed, to the society of her favourite, had gratified the khan, and led him to hope that he might obtain from his captive the ready favour and submission to his will, which even the most savage of men prefer, in their dealings with woman, to a forced obedience. An attempt at escape never entered his head. Encompassed as the place was

with walls, surrounded with Toorkoman camps, and far removed from any source of assistance to one in her condition, placed under the charge of such guardians as usually watch a harem — what cause could there be, in truth, to provide against, still less to dread, any such contingency.

Accordingly Leilah, attended by Guleyaz, was permitted to leave the harem, properly veiled, and to mount a turret on the walls, which commanded a view of the plains below and the distant hills. From this elevated point they saw the numerous camps of the Toorkomans, each divided into its separate muhulehs, formed into squares or circles, and all alive with their numerous occupants; — the men in their rough fur caps, slovenly joobas, and carrying their long formidable spears — the women in their high fantastic head-dresses and loose untidy garments. Nearer, under the slope of the *tuppeh*, or earthen mound on which the fort was built, lay the town, or rather village, with its mud and straw huts, and its wretched but crowded bazars, surrounded also with a slighter wall. Beyond, at a distance on one side, appeared the pass of the *Dehineh Derkesh*, a narrow tortuous ravine, and on the other a dark hollow leading into the valley of the Sarasoo and the passes to the Attock. The keen eye of the Koordish maiden glanced over all these localities with an intelligent activity, the fruit of an anxious and adventurous life, while Leilah only gazed upon the scene with an earnest longing for freedom, yet with little of the energy required for obtaining it. But the indulgence was valuable to both; for the one made observations calculated to be available in future, the other gained in health from the breeze, and courage from the confidence of her companion.

On the following day, when the same indulgence

was applied for, the old gees-suffeed informed her that the khan could see no good reason, he said, why, if she were able to walk about the walls, she should not wait upon him, and that, therefore, she must make up her mind to go to the khelwut so soon as he might require her presence. The reply of Leilah was in terms of the understanding she had come to with her friend — that she was the khan's servant, ready to obey his commands, and that, after the Shub-e-jumah, when her devotions should have been duly performed, she should await his orders. The humble and resigned tone in which this representation was made delighted the old woman so much, that she swore, by the khan's head, she should have every reasonable liberty; and, accordingly, the maidens were, on this occasion, left to pursue their way, without a guard or guide, and Guleyaz resolved to commence a more systematic examination of the place.

They left the harem by a postern or private passage, which was commonly used by the servants of the harem, and those of its inmates whose motions were under little control, and which, the old woman informed them, would lead through a court and some ruinous buildings at once to a *bourje* or tower, from whence the finest view of all might be obtained. The court, it appeared, was deserted and probably disused; for its chambers of mud were open and tenantless, and the entrance was without either guard or door. Beyond this, they found the ruinous buildings spoken of by the old woman — so ruinous, indeed, that it was difficult to conjecture what their use might have been. The mass consisted of a square building of considerable extent, inclosed by a confused series of walls, and covered with small mud domes, many of which had fallen in, but under the centre of which appeared a

deep hollow like the opening of a hauze, or water-cistern. The squeaking and fluttering of a multitude of bats confirmed the tale of utter desertion which the external aspect of the place proclaimed; the very air was flagging and oppressive; and, as Leilah and Guleyaz glanced at each other's faces, they read their mutual conviction that, in the hole before them, they beheld the fatal well to which the malicious Toorkomanee had made such significant allusion.

Quitting the place with a shudder of disgust, they regained the trodden pathway which led into a narrow space that was carried round the interior of the walls, and crossing this, they ascended the bourje. From this station, Guleyaz observed, with satisfaction, yet without surprise, the mutilated state of the walls, so often observable even in the most important Persian fortresses: not only were they weather-worn, but at a short space from the foot of the bourje on which they stood, appeared the opening of what probably had been a postern-gate, but which, now no longer closed by a door, was evidently used as a common means of ascent from the town by those who cared not to take the round of the gateway; for a trodden pathway led from it down the steep side of the *tuppeh*, and could be traced among the huts all the way to the bazar.

Guleyaz, resolving to ascertain that this communication was permanently open, descended with Leilah from the tower, and took their way along the open space at the wall foot, passing the postern and its pathway, with only a transitory glance at the door-way. It was fortunate that she made no pause, for they had not proceeded many yards, when before them appeared the Toorkomanee banou, with two young women of her own country, coming along the very path they had taken.

"Ahi! who have we here?" said she, sharply — "veiled women? who are ye, and whither go ye?"

Guleyaz, though loth to discover herself, seeing that to pass her without further question would be impossible, removed her veil at once, and said, "By the favour of my banou, it is my mistress, who has the khan's permission to take the air."

"To take the air, hah! to take wing, I suppose — said I not that this girl would laugh at her master's beard? — And whither go ye?"

"We have been enjoying the view from you bourje, and are going round to the entrance."

"Wonderful liberty this, for *purdeh nisheens*,* truly — but the khan shall know my mind upon the matter — and then, he is the master. Back — back, I say, to your dens, girls — home, or it may be the worse for you — wonderful good discipline we keep, when strangers like you are let loose through the kallah."

Leilah, whose spirits had been rising with the improved aspect of her affairs, and whose indignation was roused by the insolence of one, who, from the first, had manifestly laid herself out to torment her, on hearing the last remark, lifted her voice, and said, "And what is it to thee, O woman, if our lord permits us, prisoners or captives as we are, to take the air, in order to get rid of our diltungee (heart sickness)—art thou our mistress? If so, we must obey — but, if the khan be master here, then are his words our law; and his indulgences are lawful."

"La illah-il-ullah! well done, maiden!" exclaimed the Toorkomanee, after a pause of surprise — "by the head of the khan, thy cheer is greatly

* Persons belonging to the harem — literally "sitters behind the curtain."

changed from that day which thou rememberest, when thy tongue was tied — Astafferullah ! let the khan look to it, or the slave may soon become the mistress — so — we are less than the least in thy eyes ; — but by the salt of the khan, and by Allah I swear, thou shalt know, and that full soon, that Tenkah Banou is something in Semulghan, and that she who desires to live there in peace, will do well to keep clear of her path — go thy ways, maiden — thou shalt yet have cause to remember this hour. For thee, slave of a slave," continued she, turning to Guleyaz — " beware of thorns, lest thou prick thy fingers — keen as thou art, there is yet a keener eye on thee, and thy meddling may be checked in a way thou dreamest not of."

The parting threat was lost on neither of the maidens, but its effects on each was different as their respective tempers. Guleyaz was roused by it to yet more wakeful circumspection and to more resolute self-command. Leilah, after the momentary excitement was over, was appalled and confounded ; and although she struggled with her weakness, she yet felt her confidence sadly impaired for the time. But the heart, like the senses, becomes habituated to painful impressions ; and as the inhabitants of a beseiged city at length scarcely hear the cannon roar, so Leilah, in like manner, became less sensible to the anxiety which at first had nearly overwhelmed her.

Time, however, was passing on, and the necessity of having some communication with her brother pressed every hour more strongly on Guleyaz. To effect this was the difficulty ; for although a rendezvous had been appointed, the hazard of making inquiries in a place to whch she was an utter stranger, was almost too great to be incurred for any consideration. Still something must be deter-

mined on; and Guleyaz resolved that very night to attempt an interview with her brother, who, on his part, she knew must be also contemplating some such effort. Accordingly, at an hour of the night when the females of the harem had returned to rest, and even the orgies of the khelwut were no longer heard, she wrapped her veil around her, and stole from the apartment.

In a well-regulated harem, such a step as Guleyaz now ventured on could scarcely have failed of leading to death or disgrace; but she was aware that the establishment of Zekee Khan had so little of regularity to boast of, that the risk she ran was comparatively small. Unprincipled and capricious in his dealings with women—wives, concubines, or slaves, were wedded, or purchased, or obtained by capture, then sold, cast off, or put to death, as the whim or the passion of the moment impelled. Such of his wives as policy forbade him to destroy, whether they had children or not, sat despised and void of influence in the underoon. There was no respectable female to regulate or conduct the establishment. The favourite of the hour held a precarious and short-lived sway, which seldom lasted long enough to extend beyond her own sphere. Among those of inferior rank who retained the greatest share of influence with her master, was the old gees-suffeed or duenna, who has been already introduced to the reader; but her authority was greatly interfered with by one whose ambition would have willingly monopolized all power, either within or without the harem. The old Toorkomanee, Tenkah Banou, as the mother of Goorg Allee was called, had, partly upon the credit of her son; partly by her own restless activity, established an influence with the khan which had been permitted to extend to the underoon; and often did she

use it, sorely to the discomfort of its wretched inhabitants. Its tendency, in fact, was rather to disorganise the little of system which existed, than introduce sobriety and order; the harem of Kallah Khan presented a singular union of Toorkoman laxity and indifference, with Kuzzilbash jealousy. Of the females who inhabited it, those who had outlived the hour of favour, enjoyed the freedom of neglect, unless when some gross misdemeanour attracted the fury of their lord — and then the cord or the knife, or the silent and convenient old *hauze* were ever at hand to dispose of the culprit. Such was the condition of things which tempted Guleyaz to undertake the enterprize we have described above, and which, in spite of her ignorance of localities, she did not despair of accomplishing.

In the passage leading to the first court, there slept an old woman, whose habitual caution was roused, even by the light step of the maiden, and she called out to know who was there? answering, at the same time, her own question by saying, "Is it you, Meertha?" Guleyaz mumbling a few indistinct words of assent, was proceeding, when the same voice called out again, "Is your mistress yet returned, Meertha?" The maiden now conjectured that some of the ladies had gone out and was expected back; so replying merely "Not yet," she was permitted to pass on unmolested.

She reached the postern of the harem — it was open; and Guleyaz, trusting to fortune for finding it so upon her return, traversed the court, and, passing by the ruined building, shot across the pathway towards the open postern in the wall. She was just about to enter it, when the sound of footsteps and suppressed voices startled her, and, stepping back under the shadow of a mass of

earth, she awaited to see who might be coming. In a little while two men entered it from without; like herself, they seemed desirous of concealment, for they crouched in the dark part of the passage, and stole along towards the ruins. In doing so they passed within a few feet of her concealment, and the heart of Guleyaz beat quick as she saw that they were clad in the Toorkoman dress. Breathlessly did she wait their closer approach, and then she felt confident that in the one she beheld the form and proportions of her brother. A few low-breathed words, addressed to his companion, confirmed her assurance, and she resolved to risk uttering the signal by which they had agreed to make themselves known to each other. The effect justified her boldness and accuracy of apprehension; for, although the sounds were scarcely audible, Reza Koolee stopped and gazed around. "Hush!" whispered he, "it is herself—Guleyaz! —sister! where art thou?" In a moment they met, and scarcely admitting time for a question or reply, the maiden hurried her brother and his companion into the interior of the ruined pile.

"Alhumdulillah! thanks to the Almighty for this meeting!" whispered she; "it is a presage of success — I was on my way to seek you in this village."

"Our luck is good," said he; "so long a time had passed without any tidings from you, that I feared some bad event; and Jaffer here, who is a perfect guide in the Kallah, undertook to make me acquainted this night with the outward parts of the harem. Whatever we do, it must be done by this way; — but, in the name of Allah, how is Leilah?"

"Leilah is well, brother, and *all* is well as yet, although she has suffered severely; — but the

Shub-e-jumah must see her taken from hence, or all will be lost!"

"Punah-be-khodah! Indeed! — but after all, that is the night fixed upon."

"Yes, and the night we must act in, as you hope to see Leilah your own; — but time presses, I may not wait — discovery would be certain were I to be shut out this night from the harem: — to-morrow, at two hours after evening prayers, be here, in this place — all must then be arranged. — Have you discovered where the youth is confined?"

"Aye, we have, Guleyaz, and the guard has been gained over — he goes with us on Shub-e-jumah, if not sooner."

"Inchallah! inchallah! Now, bismillah! — but have a care as you go — look well at the postern in the wall before you pass out — there are persons expected by that path into the Kallah, whom it would hardly be safe to meet!" They parted, and Guleyaz returned, without obstacle, to the apartment of her mistress.

Permission had been obtained for Leilah to receive her brother on the morrow, and Guleyaz was in hopes that an opportunity might then be had of communicating with him regarding the purposed plan of escape. But in this she was disappointed, for Tenkah Banou, who evidently had discovered some cause for suspicion, or who, from a naturally jealous and malignant temper, sought for one, was there with her keen eye and sinister expression, and remained resolved, as it seemed, to prevent any confidential intercourse between the parties. Only when the youth took his leave, and Leilah was embracing her brother, did Guleyaz contrive to whisper, "To-morrow night expect your deliverers," when, seeing the quick,

snake-like glance of the Toorkomanee upon them, she said no more, and retired to her station at the bottom of the room.

That night was an anxious and momentous one for every one connected with the enterprise. At the hour which had been appointed for the meeting with her brother, Guleyaz once more quitted her mistress, and, having told the old gees-suffeed that Leilah had left her *tusbee* or rosary, and a favourite *bazu-bund* talisman in the bourje on the wall, she was, without difficulty, permitted to go and seek it. On entering the ruined building, so dark, so dreary, that the heart of ordinary maidens would have quailed, and shrunk from approaching it, she thought she heard the rustling of a garment: she stopped — held her breath to listen, and withdrew behind a fragment of the wall — but nothing further could she see or hear. Again she advanced and looked around — nothing visible disturbed the thick darkness, and all was still, except the faint hum and shout from the village below, and the occasional burst of revelry from the khelwut of the khan, where he sat carousing with some of his boon companions. The still evening air rested heavily among the ruins — a fanciful mind might have imagined it loaded with the breath of murder, and that the bats, as they flitted past, brushing her very face, were evil spirits let loose to do their bidding on the sons of men. The scene and the occasion were alike trying, but the heart of Guleyaz was settled and bent up to the work before her, and she resolutely waited for those who were pledged to meet her there. Once, and once only, again, was her suspicion awakened by a sound which resembled a suppressed sigh — or the effort of one who strives to repress some convulsive movement in the throat

— but it might have been the squeak or gibber of a bat, or the whistle of its wing as it passed close to her ear, and, in another moment, more welcome and less equivocal sounds broke upon the silence — the shuffling noise of cautious and muffled footsteps. She cast her eyes towards the entrance — it was obscured by the forms of two people — the low-uttered signal left no doubt that it was those she waited for, and she sprung forward to meet them.

No time was wasted in greeting; Reza Koolee informed her, that, by the assistance of two discontented Goklan chiefs, he had secured, not only a passage unmolested through their camps, but assistance to fly beyond them. That he had heard of the direct route to the yeilâk being occupied by the people of Goorg Allee, who was understood to be on his return from Mianabad; therefore they must take that of the Dehineh Derkesh, which, though more circuitous, would be more safe. Horses were to be stationed on the following evening near the camp of Aslan Khan Goklan, a party of whose people were to convey and assist the fugitives. The same Aslan Khan, who had been party to the chappow upon the yeilâk, and who had expected a valuable recompense in plunder or pay, being disappointed and indignant, had contrived to secure the assistance of the keeper who had charge of the prisoners, who, instead of leading Abbas Koolee back to prison in the forenoon on his leaving the harem, had secreted him until dusk, and then carried him into camp to await the arrival of the rest of the fugitives. So far all was prepared — the rest depended on Guleyaz alone, for only she could act within the harem. And thus was the affair arranged.

The festival, of which the preparations were now

forward, was to commence with the appearance of the new moon in the western sky—an event which was expected to take place soon after sun-down; and, in one hour, all would be uproar, and noise, and rejoicing. It was at that period, when the inmates of the harem would be permitted to view the revels, when suspicion would be lulled, and vigilance in great measure withdrawn, that Guleyaz proposed to quit the kallah. Two Toorkoman cloaks, with caps and boots, which Reza Koolee and his friend had brought along with them, were to remain concealed in the ruin for their use, so that, having slipped out of the harem itself, they might be at once disguised for their journey. In this way were they to make their way through the unguarded postern, or, failing that, to push round for the gateway, which for that night would be open to all, and repair at once to the rendezvous, which was to be a vacant ruin close to the end of the bazar.

So absorbed had they all been by the interest of these discussions and arrangements, that they had probably relaxed, in some degree, from that watchful circumspection which their situation demanded; but a sudden pause having occurred in their whispered conversation, their attention was instantly attracted by the smothered but uneasy breathing of some person near them. "Betrayed, by Allah!" said Reza Koolee, after a moment's pause had convinced him of the truth — "Jaffer, seize that person, while I examine the place!" Jaffer rushed to the spot, and soon returned, dragging with him a woman, who struggled with him powerfully: the hood which she wore falling off, her countenance became visible—and not even the obscurity of the place could prevent Guleyaz from recognising the vindictive and distorted features of Tenkah Banou!

With a shudder of horror, and scarcely suppressing a shriek, the maiden articulated her name. "Aye, girl!" replied the Toorkomanee, who, finding herself discovered, assumed at once the high tone of authority she usually arrogated — "aye, girl! the same. Said I not that a keener eye than even thine was upon thee? You are known, and so are ye all! Release me! — let me go, villain! or I alarm the fort!" and she struggled fiercely in the grasp of Jaffer. "What, slave! darest thou? — then take this, and go to hell!" But the blue gleam of a knife that flashed in the upraised hand she had freed from his hold, betrayed the coming danger to Jaffer. "Aha, tigress! art thou there?" said he, as he suddenly closed with her and caught her by the throat, with a determined gripe — "release thee! — whose fools should we be then?"

"Oh, stay! stay! — spare her! — mercy!" said Guleyaz, in a hoarse, agitated whisper — "shed not her blood!"

"Blood! no, lady — not blood!" replied Jaffer, in accents interrupted by the horrid struggle in which he was engaged — "but this devil must tell no tales!"

"Guleyaz," said her brother, who returned to the spot at the noise, "it is dreadful, but necessary! the woman must be silenced — all — all are ruined else — you! Leilah! myself! all our associates!"

"Oh! oh! it is horrible!" said Guleyaz, putting her hands to her ears, to shut out the throttling sounds of the dying woman. "Amaun! amaun!" and "Allah! Allah!" were faintly uttered, as the grasp of Jaffer for a moment relaxed; but his arms were strong as the necessity — and when next his gripe was loosened from her throat, the miserable woman fell a corse at his feet. "To jehannum

with thyself!" said he, panting with exertion—"I owed thee this debt, but never hoped to pay it so soon. *Alhumdulillah la tumaum shoud!*—it is done!"

"Jaffer! Jaffer! thou art a bloody fellow!—after all, it was a woman," said Reza Koolee, himself, shuddering at his comrade's cool barbarity.

"A woman, khan!—say a tigress!—a serpent!—an evil spirit that would have sucked our blood, and cried *shookur!* though none of us had ever harmed her—the mother, too, of that Shytaun Goorg Allee himself. By my eyes! much mercy she merits at our hands!"

"Khodah buzoorg! the mother of Goorg Allee! Allah! Allah! there is retribution in that. But, after all, this corpse; it must not stay here to tell tales—we must bury it."

"The hauze! the hauze!" gasped Guleyaz—oh! well did *she* know it?—little did she dream!—it will cover all!"

The body was instantly raised by Reza Koolee and Jaffer, and, by the pale star-light, which twinkled through the broken domes, was carried to the brink of the yawning abyss. "Stay!" said Reza Koolee—"search for her signets or keys:" and, feeling in the pockets and bosom of the corse, a key and a bunch of rings and agate talismans, together with a tusbee of clay-beads, were discovered. "These may be useful," said he, as he secured them. "Stop," said Guleyaz, in the low, earnest tones of one who has made up her mind to go through with a dreadful scene—"the wretched woman had always access to the harem—perhaps that key——" "Aye, keep it, sister; to us it can be of no use—to you it may."

These being obtained, the body was, without further delay or ceremony, dropped into the hole:

the space which elapsed before the heavy plash with which it fell was heard, betokened the secure profundity of this revolting grave; and the clamour of the foul creatures beneath, disturbed by the shock, sounded like the distant voices of fiends rejoicing over a fresh prey. The conference was over: heart-struck at the horrid scene, but grateful to Providence for revealing and delivering them from their danger, the brother and sister separated, firmly relying on the event as an omen of success; and Guleyaz, as before, regained her chamber unmolested, and, as it seemed, unsuspected.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE.

Those who have known what it is to be upon the eve of a hazardous enterprise—to count the slowly passing hours, as the moment of action draws nigh—to watch every movement and look of those whose most trivial word or act may change your whole destiny—to experience the terrible responsibility of fixing on measures or on moments on which more than life depends, when the judgment may be warped by impatience, or obscured by anxiety— those who have been so tried, and those alone, can comprehend the torturing restlessness to which, during this momentous night and the succeeding day, Reza Koolee and his sister, as well as the gentle object of their enterprise, were victims. At length, the time drew nigh, the sun was sinking in the west, and every eye was strained towards that quarter, to catch the first glimpse of the new moon. As the light died away, and the clouds settled low round the throne of the setting sun, more than one voice was raised, and many a finger prematurely pointed to the western heavens; but

at length no doubt remained—the thin, pale, cloud-like crescent, which remained stationary while other fleecy vapours glided by, was undoubtedly the wished-for object; hundreds of arms were raised towards it, drums beat, trumpets and horns blew, and thousands of voices shouted "*Moobarik bashud!*"

The mirth and jollity began; in every camp, in almost every tent, rude instruments of music struck up the airs of the desert, reminding the Toorkomans of the deeds of their fathers; smoking dishes of pillau loaded the sofras, and oceans of sherbet, and of the more intoxicating kimmiz were prepared, to suit the appetites of the numerous guests. Yet, in the midst of all this mirth and feasting, there was one quarter of the town and of the fortress, where joy seemed not to enter—it was that where were the habitations of Goorg Allee Beg and his followers. Early on the morning which succeeded that eventful night, the banou was missed; but as she frequently remained all night in the harem of the khan, no doubts of her safety were entertained until a late hour, when it was found she was not there. Two of her slaves reported that she had assuredly gone in the evening to the kallah, as, after accompanying her to the gate, they had waited, according to her orders, in a place appointed by herself, when not having appeared, they had, towards morning, returned home, supposing her to have remained there for the night The alarm on this became general; but as neither Goorg Allee nor his mother were general favourites, the sensation created was rather that of amazement at the extraordinary and mysterious disappearance of a person of so much consideration, than of sorrow or sympathy for the sufferers. In fact, as the preparations for the festival went on, and the hour of

rejoicing approached, the minds of all became absorbed in that important business, and the banou and her fate were disregarded or forgotten; the khan promised himself a deeper than ordinary debauch, the women greater enjoyment than usual, and the whole place a higher degree of pleasure and delight than in the nature of things could be realised.

It was in the midst of this whirl of gay hilarity that Guleyaz and her charge, having prepared themselves, sallied forth from their chamber to the court of the harem, which by that time was crowded with women. Of these some were disposed, as it seemed, to enjoy themselves where they were; and, in several of the small chambers, preparations for feasting were already begun. Others were resolved to sally forth, to view the revelry in the village. Along with these the two maidens might, possibly, have left the harem unquestioned; but their disguises were in the ruins near the postern, and without them they could not proceed.

Separating themselves, therefore, from the busy throng, they gained the entrance of the passage; it was dark and empty, presenting no obstacle whatever to their presence; but when they had reached the door of this postern, or private entrance, it was found to be closed. This was a check for which they were unprepared, and which was highly embarrassing. There was nothing for it, however, but to return, and try to secure an exit by the regular entrance.

While musing over the impediment, Guleyaz recollected the key which had been taken from the body of Tenkah Banou, but which, among the stupefying recollections of that evening, had escaped her remembrance. Her conjecture was right — it was in fact the key with which the banou was in

the habit of entering the harem at her pleasure — the door no longer resisted — and they entered the ruinous court.

They had reached the mazes of the mutilated building, and were about to look for their disguises, when Leilah started, and caught the arm of her companion — " In the name of God! what is yonder?" she gasped — " we are betrayed!"

A cold sweat broke even from the forehead of Guleyaz, as her eyes, following the direction of Leilah's arm, rested on a muffled female figure, sitting upon a fragment of wall close to the fatal hauze — " Allah kureem! it is the ghost of the murdered banou! she half uttered — " but let us know the truth," said she mentally, — " this is no moment for doubt or empty fears" — and with the intrepidity of her character she stepped forward to ascertain who the stranger might be. Their footsteps startled the figure, which, rising from its seat, came forward to meet them with a low obeisance, and relieved their alarm, by whispering these words — " May God protect you, khanum, inchallah! I come by command of my master, Aslan Khan, and of his friend and guest, Reza Koolee Khan, and they bid me say that no time must be lost, as those are abroad whom it would be ill to meet; and I am further desired to guide you to their presence."

These words, although they removed the fear she had entertained at first, gave rise to others of a no less alarming description. " We are fortunate," she said, " in having met with you — but you are a stranger to us, and the business is important — has the khan sent no token by thee?"

" Undoubtedly," was the reply — I have not come without a token. — He bade me remind you of the dangers of Muzeenoon Kuveer, and your escape in the passes of the Jaghetai."

"It is well," said Guleyaz — "we are ready to follow thee."

Their dresses were soon on, and cautiously examining their way, the woman led them through the postern, and down the slope of the tuppeh, from which they could see the numerous fires beneath, glancing merrily, and suiting well with the sounds of mirth which issued from the joyous groups around them. Guleyaz would have stopped at the rendezvous appointed with her brother, but her guide informed her, that time not permitting any halt at that place, which, moreover, was rendered dangerous by the nnmerous stragglers. She had been directed to lead them at once to her master's tents. Accordingly threading the crowded bazar, where their figures excited neither attention nor inquiry, they reached the gateway, and passed it without question. From thence they took their way across fields and sahrah, to a cluster of black tents; and there, in truth, did Guleyaz find her brother — Leilah, both a brother and a lover; for as she entered the dark dwelling, the young Abbas Koolee threw himself into her arms.

No time could, however, be given to the indulgence of feeling. Aslan Khan, a stern old Toorkoman, grumbled out a few words to Reza Koolee, who said, "Sister — beloved Leilah, time presses — Goorg Allee is at hand, and that bodes us danger. Late last night it is said, a fleet horseman was dispatched to hasten his return, and he is expected here some hours before midnight; let us mount at once, and put our trust in Allah! — what say you, khan?"

"Bismillah!" responded Aslan — "your horses are ready, and twenty as stout and brave *juans*, as ever rode on a chappow."

So saying, they proceeded to the place where

the horses were picketted. Of these, a certain number were saddled and prepared with with provisions and necessaries in their joals; and Reza Koolee, having already placed Leilah upon one, was about to mount his own, when a party of a dozen horsemen rode up to the spot. "Salaam aleicoom!" said their leader — "has Aslan Khan an expedition on his hands? and does he choose the night of the festival as fortunate, that his young men stand thus with their feet in the stirrup, and their hands on the mane?"

The question was not less embarrassing than the sudden appearance of the questioner; but Reza Koolee, with admirable readiness replied, "Aslan Khan has heard of the approach of the worthy Goorg Allee Beg, and he sends a peishwaz to meet him."

"The Beg," replied the horseman drily, "is close at hand, and the peishwaz is not required."

"But I am the bearer of a message to the Beg," said Reza Koolee — "behold the token — the signet of the banou is on my finger."

The man gazed with an altered look and tone upon the ring, and said, "Then all is well, proceed in peace — may God protect you!" And, calling his men, he rode off in the direction of the fort. The party gazed on each other with the air of people who have escaped some imminent danger, and pronounced "Alhumdulillah!" with a long-drawn breath. "Mount — mount, in the name of God!" said Reza Koolee, instantly recovering himself — "lose not a moment — suspicion is abroad, and the least delay may ruin us."

"That is certain," said Aslan Khan — "and by the prophet, when next they come to look for Aslan Khan, they will find his place empty — Reza Koolee Khan — mashallah! you answered

well, — you are wise — may your shadow never be less, the Goklan will be your friend."

By this time they were in their saddles; and, with a hearty "May God protect you!" from the old Toorkoman, they moved off at a rapid pace. Reza Koolee, determined at least to secure the safety of Leilah, fastened the spare rein or halter of her horse to his saddle; and, sending forwards three of the Toorkomans to clear the way, took the lead of his party. Guleyaz, accompanied by Abbas Koolee, followed them, and the rest of the Toorkomans brought up the rear.

In this manner they had proceeded somewhat less than a fursung, still in the plain of Semulghan, when the trampling of a heavy body of horse was heard on their left, and before a single measure could be taken for escape or defence, the cries of "Stop the ghorumsaugs! seize them! cut them down!" were followed by the rush of a charge. All that Reza Koolee could do was to shout out some words of encouragement to his sister — to strike his own horse with the stirrups, and push forwards at full speed. The courage of Leilah thus excited, and with the hope of escape so strong in her soul, rose with the occasion. She spurred her willing and spirited horse, and in an instant they were clear of the scattered party. The ground flew from under them, and, in a few minutes, the din and the tumult of the attack died away behind. Except the snort of their own horses and the clang of their feet, and a distant shout or hollow, all was still — too still; for where were all their companions? where Guleyaz and Abbas Koolee? They reined up their horses, and checked their speed for a moment, and soon was the rapid tramp of horses heard. "It is them, inchallah!" said Reza Koolee dubiously, but it was neither time nor place

for incautious confidence, and his ready sword was in his hand. It was well that he was on his guard; for the dress and appointments of the strangers as they thundered on, proved, even in the darkness, that they were no Toorkomans. "Stop and yield!" they cried, as they advanced with spears in rest — but Reza Koolee, in altering his position to protect Leilah, moved almost unconsciously out of the path of their charge, and one of them shot by in full career; the spear of the other struck him on the breast, but, glancing from the steel plate which he wore, wounded him slightly in the shoulder, and the horses met with a desperate shock. The impulse with which his opponent came on, unsettled his seat; and, before he could recover himself, he fell heavily to the ground, cloven from shoulder to chest by the sword of Reza Koolee; who, being at rest, had resisted the shock which threw his own horse upon its haunches. The first, who had reined up, turned just in time to see his comrade's fate; and observing, probably, that there was now two to one, rode away, and was lost in the darkness.

"In the name of God, we must push on!" said Reza Koolee, his heart smitten with anxiety at the absence of his sister and the boy — "inchallah! inchallah! they will meet us there!" And again putting their horses into motion, they shot forward, and soon began to ascend the defile of the Dehineh-Derkesh. This was a narrow rocky pass, which led to an extensive plain, where, in days of old, both caravanserais and water reservoirs had been constructed for the use of travellers. All had long since gone to decay. The caravanserais were utterly ruinous, and only occupied by robbers and Eeliauts; but of the hauzes or water cisterns, which were solid buildings supplied by subterraneous springs, several yet were in condition to perform

their office; and at one of these, the Hauze-e-Khatoon, the fugitives arrived an hour before sun-rise.

A signal from Reza Koolee was answered by two loud shouts from a hollow on the left, and in a few minutes he was surrounded by a score of well-armed and mounted men. "Now, dearest Leilah! thou, at least, art safe!" said he exultingly — "but where are Guleyaz and your brother?" His question soon met with a full reply. The earliest dawn had scarcely tinged the east, when three horsemen were seen approaching the hauze. The signal was made and answered, and the strangers soon joined the party. It was Jaffer, with two of the Toorkomans, and he told a tale that blasted all their hopes. He was just beyond the lady and the young Beyaut Khan, he said, when the attack was made. Every one spurred on to avoid the shock, when the lady's horse stumbled and fell — the young khan instantly reined up, and sprung from his horse to assist her; but the Toorkomans scattered, and the assailants closed in upon them, so that in a moment they were all enveloped in the tumult and the dust of the charge; thus, though he reined up also, he could see or do nothing. How he escaped, he knew not — but that either the lady or the young khan could have escaped, he conceived to be impossible — if not killed, they must inevitably have been taken. "But," added he, "we must look to ourselves — there is no safety for us here — Goorg Allee is now in Kallah Khan — another sort of person than the besotted chief — when he discovers what has happened, he will burn the fathers of all the Semulghanees, and turn the country upside down. Our horses are fresh, khan, and the Koh-e-Jaghutai is far off — it is only there we can lay our heads on the pillow of security."

"And my sister!" said Reza Koolee — "and the boy!"

"What can I state, sir? Here are we, weak and few — they are strong and on their guard — we have the lady, at all events — let us give thanks to God, and not throw ourselves uselessly to these dogs."

"What! and abandon them to death?"

"I would humbly suggest, not so. If they have escaped in the skirmish — as, inchallah! they have done, Goorg Allee will keep them like his own eyes. He knows that their ransom will be rich — that the terms he can command, with them in his power, will be favourable, whatever may be his views."

"Right, Jaffer — right — it is a heavy misfortune — God help them in the hands of that wolf — but surely life will be safe. Yes, we can do no good here — bismillah! let us secure what we have, and our fate may work for us yet."

Their journey from the Hauze-e-Khatoon to the yeilâk Ildooz, was performed without further danger or difficulty; and they found the meerza there, impatiently expecting tidings. His distress was great when he learned the unfortunate event which had marred the promising commencement of their enterprize; but he perfectly agreed with Jaffer in his opinion regarding the safety of the prisoners. "My life upon it," said he, "that Goorg Allee knows his own interest too well to touch a hair of their heads. The fact is, that his influence has, within a short period, suffered a serious diminution both at Semulghan and Mianabad — the star of his destiny is evidently on the decline, and he will seek rather to secure friends than to increase his enemies. The discontent of the Toorkoman tribes you yourself have had occasion to witness. They

have sworn, that unless he procures the fulfilment of all promises made to them, and fully satisfies their insatiable cupidity, they will 'burn his father.' Nor is this spirit of disaffection confined to them. The khan is known to be a beast — a man of nothing; and it has been discovered that his favourite works for himself alone, without regarding even his friends, except in so far as they make useful tools.

"At Mianabad, I have the best grounds to know that every thing is ripe for revolt. It was, unquestionably, the wide spread of disaffection there that kept Goorg Aliee so long away from Semulghan — and it is well for you he was thus detained; for, he is not one of those men who walk with their eyes shut; and had you been taken, khan, the game was lost — as it is, depend upon it, he will use his advantage to make his own terms both with Sirafrauz Khan and with your party, at Mianabad — perhaps he may attempt it with yourself, for he is a fox that has many tricks. But, convey this lady to her father — let the khan increase his force, by all possible means — leave me to collect intelligence, and, inchallah! we shall see things go right yet."

The meerza's reasoning was too obviously just to admit of dispute — and his advice, under existing circumstances, the best to follow. We shall not attempt to describe the mingled joy and agony with which the khan received his darling daughter, and deplored his no less dear and only son — the support of his house and family. For, when first he heard of the circumstances under which the party was dispersed, and Guleyaz and Abbas Koolee were lost sight of, he gave up hope of recovering them, and refused to be comforted. Nor shall we endeavour to paint his mingled feelings of

gratitude and self-reproach towards the young Koordish chief, who had chosen so noble a species of retribution for the slights he had endured.

To suppress the ebullition of his excited feelings, and restrain within the bounds of prudence his eagerness for revenge, was a trial almost too great for his own self-command, aided by the strenuous advice of his friends: but the season was adverse to all warlike occupations, and the arrangements considered requisite to insure success were more easily concerted than completed, so that his impatience was, of necessity, placed under control.

In the course of a few days a deputation arrived at the yeilâk from Semulghan, on the part of Zekee Khan, the purport of which was to acquaint Sirafrauz Khan with the fact that his son, Abbas Koolee, and the sister of Reza Koolee, were both his prisoners, and to declare that their fate should depend, in the first place, upon his consenting to the union between their families so frequently proposed; and, secondly, on his affording effectual and hearty co-operation towards procuring from Reza Koolee Khan a formal resignation of all his right and title to the possession of Mianabad and its dependencies.

A proposition so arrogant and insulting aroused in Sirafrauz Khan that dignity and self-possession which family distress and perplexity had somewhat caused him to lose sight of. An assembly of his officers and heads of families was instantly summoned, and he not only laid before them the substance of the message from Semulghan, but explained and commented upon the various events which had led to it. He reminded them of the mortification and loss which he had suffered on his retreat from Seradeh, but in doing so he pointed

out the infinitely more sweeping destruction which might have overtaken the tribe but for the opportune information which had so unexpectedly reached him. He adverted to his own personal danger, and almost miraculous rescue upon that occasion from the hands of the Toorkomans. He spoke with the indignation and feeling of an insulted and injured warrior of the series of extraordinary deception which had led to the surprize of his family in their yeilâk, so generally an abode of peace and safety; and he detailed the extraordinary efforts which had been made to rescue that family from the power of their captors.

"Kinsmen and friends!" said he, after this recapitulation, "it now remains that I point out the author of all these worthy deeds to you and to me and mine — behold him here! — it is that Reza Koolee, whose friendship was rejected — whose service was despised — who was turned, almost with ignominy, from our doors — whose blood ye scarce refrained from shedding; — it is he who saved the youth of your tribe from slaughter and disgrace; who restored your chief to life and liberty; who has twice saved his daughter and her honour, and who would have sacrificed himself and his only sister to save that of his son! Kinsmen and friends, no blame rests on us, for that we rejected the hostile chief who came among us with the blood of our sons or our fathers upon his hands, who might from us, too, have demanded the price of blood. But can we now reject the friend, who, by a long train of services, has proved his merit to the title, and whose hands have been thoroughly cleansed in the blood of our enemies? — what further can we require? Are feuds to burn unquenched to all eternity? — is it written that no sacrifice, no atonement, must ever staunch

them? — is it not, on the other hand, declared that 'blessed is he who forgiveth the sinner; but that good deeds shall be recompensed tenfold?' — Are we to leave all generosity to our enemies, and boldly declare ourselves foes to candour or magnanimity? — that, instead of admiring such virtues in our adversaries, we possess neither justice to acknowledge, nor gratitude to requite a benefit? Friends and kinsmen, it is impossible! — we cannot so blacken our own faces in the eyes of men. The Beyaut was ever a noble tribe; — they are true believers, and will never disobey the voice of God and his holy prophet; they are generous as well as brave, and will liberally requite their benefactors; they will stretch forth to Reza Koolee Khan the hand of friendship, and receive him as a dear and valued brother!"

The applause with which this address from their chief was received by the majority of the assembly, overwhelmed the murmurs of disapprobation which arose from those few whose hatreds or prejudices were too deeply rooted to yield to his reasoning or his appeal to their better feelings. With the younger and more warlike of the tribe, the measure was decidedly popular, for Reza Koolee had been loved by them as the bold and generous gholaum, and the acts of the young Koordish chief were held in almost universal admiration. It was chiefly such persons as had suffered in their disputes with the Koords, whose hearts swelled at the idea of a union with those who had slain their sons or their fathers, or who had carried their women captive away, that had ventured still to raise the voice of discontent; but their number was comparatively few, and their murmurs were disregarded.

The assembly next commenced to consider the

measures necessary, on the present crisis, with a view to the safety of the prisoners. As to any idea of entering into the compromise proposed, it never was entertained by the most timid among them. Roused, as the khan's mind now was, not even the danger of his son could move him to an undignified concession; nor could Reza Koolee permit even the peril of a favourite and only sister to influence a deliberation upon which depended so much of importance to the welfare of both tribes. A fierce and energetic appeal to arms was readily decided upon, and they resolved that the first blow should, if possible, be rapid and decisive. Explaining all he had become acquainted with regarding the dissatisfaction of the Goklan tribes, Reza Koolee proposed that some able negociator should proceed by one of the western passes to Goorgaun, and secure their neutrality if not their assistance. If this could be effected, he felt confident that, with his own knowledge of Semulghan, he should be able to effect something important, provided he was supplied with a moderate force to move rapidly upon the place by the Dehineh Derkesh, or one of the passes to the east of it. Fired by his ardour, the assembly gave their voices for this measure, to which the khan, secretly trembling for his son, very readily assented. To gain as much time upon their enemies as possible, being a point of the first importance, it was resolved to detain the messengers of Zekee Khan as long as could with decency be done, and then to dismiss them with an intimation that the measures conveyed by them were under deliberation, and that a reply should, in due time, be forwarded by fitting messengers.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONCLUSION.

The following day found the whole tribe in a state of busy preparation. Messengers were hastily dispatched to summon all whom business or other duties had prevented from attending the general muster: the places of rendezvous, and plan of operations, were fixed upon, and explained to the principal leaders, and such general orders as the occasion demanded were issued to all the officers. On the succeeding night, the whole force was to have commenced their march; but the afternoon brought tidings which produced a material alteration both in the objects and arrangements of the expedition.

The khan was sitting in close council with his principal officers, when the approach of strangers was announced; and to the surprise of Reza Koolee, Meerza Seleem, his friend, very slightly attended, entered the inclosure where they sat; his appearance, way-worn and travel-stained, excited a general curiosity, which increased to the deepest interest, when the tidings of which he was the

bearer became known. The communication, which was, however, at first confined to the ears of his own master and the khan, ran, in substance, as follows.

The discontents prevailing at Mianabad, in consequence of the usurper's injudicious rapacity and gross partiality, had strengthened the very party which it was the aim of these measures to crush. It was, in fact, as had been already surmised, the alarm occasioned by this growing evil that led Goorg Allee to spend so much of his time of late at that place, where his influence with the khan, and the fear entertained of his abilities, contributed to maintain a temporary and deceitful calm. It was a fatal mistake; for while it did no permanent good at Mianabad, it compromised his interests exceedingly at Semulghan. There, the impolicy, or rather the insanity and short-sighted parsimony of Zekee Khan had totally alienated the Toorkoman tribes, while his private profligacy had rendered the better classes of his own subjects indifferent, if not hostile, to his cause; and Goorg Allee, returning on the night of the festival to Kallah Khan, was thoroughly alarmed at observing the symptoms of general disaffection with which he was received.

The mysterious disappearance of his mother was a startling as well as a most unaccountable occurrence, on which all the severity and even cruelty of the enquiry which took place threw no light whatever. It seemed to him as a token portending his own downfall, and it affected alike his temper and his spirits. On the morrow, it was discovered that Aslan Khan, with three other Goklan chiefs, had quitted the places of their respective encampments without notice, and had probably proceeded to their grazings on the Attock: the faith of the

rest was at least doubtful, and Goorg Allee began to tremble in earnest for the fabric of his usurped and borrowed power.

In the midst of his perplexity, a courier arrived from his deputy at Mianabad, informing him that there was every symptom of a general outbreak in that place; that the khan was in dismay, and that there was no other hope of preserving their power in the place than that of his immediate presence. With that quickness of decision for which Goorg Allee was remarkable, he took his ground at once. To lose Mianabad was, he saw, to lose every thing; for Semulghan, with a discontented people, a poorly fortified strong-hold, and very scanty resources of its own, could never, unaided, be held against the Beyaut forces; whereas, if Mianabad were made the scene of action, there would be the double chance, in the first place, of baffling the Beyauts by the hands and at the expence of their hereditary foes, of silencing the voice of disaffection, and securing possession of a very strong place; and secondly, in case of being worsted in that quarter, Semulghan would always remain for them to retreat upon; and the enemy would be forced to follow him thither with disadvantage, and probably with strength diminished, even by the struggle of victory.

At Mianabad, therefore, he resolved to make his great stand; and thither he at once took his way with his prisoners, and all the troops he could rely upon. On the possession of the former he reckoned greatly as auxiliaries to negociation; nor had he time to learn the scorn with which his first messengers were received; for, before they reached Semulghan on their return, Goorg Allee had left it for Mianabad. "And now, khan," said the meerza, in conclusion, "I have but to say, that the star of

your destiny is on the ascendant—the fortunate hour is at hand — the friends of thy late father (may his happiness be secure!) wait but thy appearance to rise in thy favour, and expel the enemy. Let Sirafrauz Khan entrust thee with but half the force now mustered here, and a thousand men will join thy standard ere it is well planted before the town. But let no time be lost — thy *talieh* works for thee: thou hast but to follow as it leads, and, unless the tidings brought thee be false, the seat and the home of thy fathers will be thine without the spilling of a drop of blood."

The joy with which this news inspired both chiefs by no means rendered them rash or incautious. A rapid movement was, of course, expedient, and every preparation was made for an assault, should it be necessary; but the meerza was sanguine in his hopes of a less bloody arbitrament. Eager to make his promise good, he resolved to proceed himself, in disguise, to the town, and to ascertain, by personal observation, the exact degree of cooperation which might be expected from within. It was agreed that the troops should march in twelve hours after, and halt at a point some distance from the place until directions should reach them for their guidance.

The important movement was made, at length; and, marshalled under Reza Koolee and the khan, the whole body advanced with so much order and expedition, that, at one hour after midnight, they reached the appointed place. There they found a special messenger, with a token from the meerza, and a written message to Reza Koolee. "Fear not to trust the bearer of this," it said — "bring with thee only fifty steady men, and be at the Mushed gate an hour before day: thou wilt there find friends who will admit thee as their master,

and defend thee with their lives. Let the army advance by dawn to the gate of Subzawar—let them negociate or threaten—but spare bloodshed!—inchallah! it will not be needed—the wolf and the tiger will both fall quietly into thy hands!" A moment's deliberation determined Reza Koolee to fall in with this arrangement; so, selecting his fifty men, among whom were many of his old comrades, he proceeded on foot to the Mushed gateway: his acquaintance with the ground made the way easy, and within the appointed time he was on the spot.

In the meantime, the khan, whose business it was to approach neither unheard nor unseen, put his troops in marching order an hour before day-break; and, by the time that objects began to be distinguishable, they had approached the gateway. No sooner were they perceived by the sentinels, than, the alarm being given, the khan and his officers ran to muster their troops, and to man the wall at the point where an attack was apprehended; but instead of the shout and discharge of weapons which they looked for from their assailants, a single horseman issued forth without either sword or spear, in an attitude which shewed that not war but peace was the object of his mission.

Advanced to the gateway, where Goorg Allee himself was seated, he proclaimed, with an audible voice, that Sirafrauz Khan, unwilling to shed innocent blood, but resolved, on the other hand, to maintain his honour, and both to repel and avenge insult, had come from his home, armed with power to take by force what his clemency now sought in terms of peace. He demanded the restoration of his son, Abbas Koolee, treacherously stolen from his home, and of Guleyaz, daughter of their late

khan, and sister to Reza Koolee Khan, the true and lawful chief of Mianabad."

The reply to this summons, which was dictated by Goorg Allee himself to a herald, briefly defied the invading force to do their worst, as no restitution was intended to be made of the persons named, unless upon compliance with the terms which had been communicated in his message from Semulghan. This reply having been formally repeated to the khan, he sent his envoy to the gate a second time, to adjure the people who might be in hearing, if not from motives of justice and equity, at least for their own sakes, to insist upon compliance with the terms now offered, and avoid the ruin that must fall upon their heads when his victorious soldiery should gain possession of their town, as, wullah! billah! should speedily be the case if they did not listen in time to reason.

The patience of Goorg Allee appeared to be exhausted: probably, he guessed that the khan had some concealed motive for this sort of temporising, although he could not exactly see its object; and he exclaimed in his own discordant voice, "Off with thee, miscreant! — avaunt! lest a flight of arrows nail thee to the spot. Let thy comrades disperse, or I order the soldiers to fire!"

"If that be the case," said the khan, who had been gradually advancing, and who, seeing that there was an end of negociation, conceived that a little clamour might aid the efforts of their friends within the walls — "if that be the case, forward, men, and clear the walls! — shoot, bowmen! — fire toffauchees!"

"Aye!" roared Goorg Allee, "fire, men! — but we have better shields here than ye think of — try if ye can hurt us through them!" and, at the mo-

ment, the khan saw his son, the young Abbas Koolee, with his hands bound behind him, together with a noble-looking and beautiful girl, brought forward on the wall close to the gateway: between them, dagger in hand, did Goorg Allee take his station, while, on the other side, stood Najjuff Allee Khan, with several of his guards and officers.

"Now, bismillah, khan," said Goorg Allee, with a bitter sneer, "ye see the full stake — play the game as ye like; — the time has been when ye scorned me and my mission — what think ye? seem I so contemptible to-day?"

"Villain! — caitiff! son of a dog!" exclaimed the father, trembling with rage as well as with alarm — dare to lay one finger on the boy, and I'll have thee sawn asunder. In the name of Allah, men! can none of ye mark that devil?"

"Raise but a matchlock! — point but an arrow, and this khunjur will be swifter than your bows or your balls — for your threats, khan, they are to me as the wind; — when my *head* is in your hands, use me as ye will — but your *heart* is now in mine!"

"Accursed villain!" — exclaimed the khan, on whose forehead the sweat stood in huge drops; for he saw the blue steel, gleaming at the moment over the head of his son, as if in mockery of his torture — but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he knew not what more to do or to say.

"And thou, worthy Reza Koolee! *legitimate* sovereign of this place," pursued the Semulghanee, in bitter irony — "where mayest thou be, while thy dear and only sister is thus in jeopardy? — Yes, khan, here they are; and once more, I repeat, accede to my terms, and this knife is sheathed in peace; — refuse, and it cuts short all further negociation, and drinks the blood of both: — when that

is done, I care not what may happen; —for myself, I hurl defiance at thee."

Again did the knife gleam high in air, and every breath was held in horror, when at once, both arm and ear was arrested by a loud noise and a sudden tumult — shots were heard, and the sound of rushing feet; and in another instant arose the cry of "Treachery — the enemy!"— "Hah! treachery?" exclaimed Goorg Allee — then these shall pay for it." The fatal dagger was raised, and a cry of anguish burst from the lips of the khan, who called frantically out for mercy — to save his son — when the arm was once more arrested, and the blow came harmless down. Guleyaz, who, from the first had watched the motions of the Semulghanee, but who, till now, believed that this aim was to intimidate, rather than perpetrate a deed of blood, in a moment saw the deadly intent, and bursting the slender bonds by which her arms had been fastened, threw herself before the boy, whose neck she clasped with one arm, while with the other she caught that of the murderer. — "Ruffian, avaunt!" she cried, — "dare not to touch the youth!"

"Ah! and thinkest thou to baffle me?" he muttered through his set-teeth — "then to hell with thee thyself!" and with the word he buried the steel hilt-deep in the body of the defenceless maiden.

The shriek that escaped the wounded Guleyaz was drowned in the universal cry of horror that burst from all sides at this atrocious act. But, intrepid even in death, while her eyes swam, and her strength failed under the fatal blow, she seized the hand of the assassin, and held the dagger in her side, with a convulsive grasp, that he might not withdraw it, and strike his other victim. In all probability her heroic courage saved the boy's life; for at the same moment the shout of Reza Koolee

was heard, and ere Goorg Allee could extricate himself from the maiden's grasp, the sword of her brother descended on his head. — "Murderous devil! take thy desert!" he exclaimed, and the thrust of his sword followed up by a vigorous blow, drove him reeling over the wall, at the foot of which he fell with a stunning crash.

The battle was over, the place was won; for the horror of the scene we have described, and the rush of the party within, had so appalled the usurper's adherents, that they offered little further resistance. But where was the conqueror? — where was he whom all eyes sought to behold, whom every tongue was ready to congratulate? Heedless of praise or of triumph, he was bending over the bleeding maiden, almost the only victim of the day. In the very flush of unalloyed success — in the golden moment of an almost bloodless victory — the honours of his fathers already bright upon his brow — their memories redeemed from scorn — the usurper of their dignities and his train all prostrate at his feet — the arm of Reza Koolee was paralysed, and his strength withered; he saw his only sister, the being whom, save one alone, he loved best of all the world, — alas! at that moment, would he not have said, better than even the idol of his heart! — She who for him had braved death and captivity — yea even dishonour itself in its most horrid shape — the dear and sole companion of his early days — the only other being of his blood — dying under the cowardly blow of an assassin! — Sacrificed in his cause, and he but one moment too late to save her!

Pale, mute, exhausted, — her eyes half closed, but with a smile upon her lips, Guleyaz still clung to the boy whose life had cost her own.

Overwhelmed with his own emotions, Abbas

Koolee had gently sunk with his burden to the earth, where, covered with the welling blood, he sat supporting her failing limbs; while Reza Koolee, who had thrown himself on his knees beside his sister, bent over her in silent anguish, seeking to yield her that assistance which mortal hand could not now administer. Heavy sobs shook her whole frame, and the frightful rush of dark gore that boiled from the wound told full surely that all must soon be over.

The application of a bandage recalled Guleyaz for a moment to sense, and she faintly gasped for water. "Dearest, dearest sister?" said Reza Koolee, in accents which he could scarce command, and speaking the comfort which he felt not—"take courage—all will yet be well." A faint and ghastly smile illuminated her countenance, as she replied —"Aye,—well, soon, soon indeed!—but praised be God, he is safe—the boy is safe. Dear brother it *is* right, it *is* well—oh it is what I wished—oh how I loved thee, brother!—I felt I could give my life for thee—and I knew—aye I knew it must be so!"

"Oh God! my sister! speak not thus—it rends my very heart! Allah! how fast she bleeds.

"Aye life is ebbing fast—Oh God! I could have wished—Ah, brother, art thou near me?—thou wilt not forget your little sister—I will tell our mother—but oh how dark!—Oh Allah, Allah!—sick—Brother—brother!"

Her arm relaxed its hold from the boy's neck; the hand held by her brother fell lifeless in his. One slight convulsion—one faint groan, and Reza Koolee clasped to his breast the now lifeless form of his noble and heroic sister! Victory and fortune, the place, the time, the strange accompaniments of the scene—what were they all to him?

He, only, felt that the being who was a part of himself — the twin creature who had been his partner in joy, his solace in distress, his defence in danger, his counsel in difficulty — she, in whose heart that now had ceased to throb, each pulse had once beat responsive to his own, lay lifeless in his arms — dead — snatched from him! Her bright soul gone to join its sister angels — her body soon to be mingled with the dust of the plain! No wonder that heart and brain reeled under the shock — he fell in bitter agony upon the body. Even the rude soldiers around were smit with sympathy. A considerate friend threw a decent covering over the hapless pair, and shrouded from vulgar eyes the mourner and the mourned. His own followers clustered round him for a while, and at length conveyed the living and the dead to a fitting place of rest.

Long was it ere the heart-stricken Reza Koolee revived to a sense of that good fortune, which Providence had thus at length bestowed upon him, and which his own conduct had well merited. But here our narrative concludes; for who that has honoured it with their attention can doubt that the head of Sirafrauz Khan was still further "exalted," and his "shadow increased;" and that Reza Koolee and the fair Leilah, as rulers of Mianabad, enjoyed such portion of happiness and prosperity, as belongs to the chequered nature of human affairs, in a country so changeful and turbulent as the border districts of Khorasan.

THE END.

PRINTED BY STEWART AND CO. OLD BAILEY.

VOLUME VIII.

WILL APPEAR ON THE FIRST OF OCTOBER.

CONTAINING

WALDEMAR,

A Tale of the Thirty Years' War.

By W. M. Harrison.